A Politics of Disgust: Selfhood, World-Making, and Ethics

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Abstract

Disgust is an “everyday” experience as it appears in everyday, ordinary moments. Yet, disgust has remained challenging to address both theoretically and in our personal interpretations of disgust experiences. Current accounts in education, psychology and the humanities have minimized how disgust can play a role in meaning-making at personal, interpersonal, and social levels. In other words, they have focused on trying to answer what disgust is, rather than what it does. My research will show that disgust has an impact on processes of selfhood, world-making, and ethics. I will argue that disgust encounters are not a residue or by-product of experiences, but rather, work to create structures of meaning about selfhood, interpersonal relationships, and the worlds we inhabit. These structures allow subjects to organize and understand their experiences. In short, disgust is about “meaning-making.” My analysis will use feminist intersubjective perspectives to examine disgust as they provide a useful way to understand the relational aspects of disgust and the ways in which disgust impacts processes and forms of understanding. In particular, I apply Jessica Benjamin’s approach to recognition to draw out disgust’s relevance to meaning-making. I will argue that disgust is an affective moment in which the struggle for recognition plays out. Through the lens of recognition, disgust’s significance to processes of selfhood, interpersonal relations, and ethics becomes evident. My analysis includes a case study of Ashley Smith’s incarceration and the circumstances leading to her death in 2007 to demonstrate the significance of disgust encounters as struggles for recognition.

Keywords: Disgust; Recognition; Selfhood; Feminist theory; Ethics; Ashley Smith

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remember the body
of your community
breathe in the people
who sewed you whole
— Rupi Kaur, *the sun and her flowers*

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List of Abbreviations

GVI-W	Grand Valley Institution for Women
CO	Correctional Officer
CSC	Correctional Service of Canada
TQ	Therapeutic Quiet cell

Introduction

Human experience is affective—we move through the world with feeling, emotion, and embodied sensations. The moment we walk into a room, board the bus, crawl into bed, sit down at the computer, we *feel* something, whether or not we are able to name or identify what it is that we feel. Consequently, to broaden an understanding of human experience requires, in part, expanding an understanding of human feeling and emotion and the ways that they shape and impact daily experiences, relationships, and worlds. Broadening an understanding of human experience includes accounting for not only the "positive" and feel-good emotions, but also those that are "negative" and demanding. Disgust is one such particularly demanding emotion.

Disgust is demanding both in its embodied experience and in the struggle to interpret and understand what disgust experiences may mean. The visceral elements of disgust—the churn of the stomach, the grimace of the face, the protruding of the tongue, the pierce of a foul smell in the nostrils—command our attention and can evoke a sense of urgency to move beyond the experience. Despite being demanding, disgust is an "everyday" experience; it appears in everyday, ordinary moments such as when we walk down the street and encounter dog feces or take out the garbage and are confronted by the smells of rotting food.[1]

[1] My research focuses on an English-speaking perspective on disgust that is situated within the broader modern Western social and cultural context. There are many interesting lines to pursue both historically, as well as in terms of culturally comparative studies. As I will discuss in chapter one, the universality of disgust has been a central research question in the literature. See Elwood & Olatunji (2009) for a review of cross-cultural studies on disgust in psychology.

The "everydayness" of disgust, however, should not deceive us into thinking disgust is simple, benign, or straightforward. To begin to illustrate this, I will share a series of "everyday" personal anecdotes that demonstrate the complexity of disgust experiences and their impacts. In some sense, the examples I share are disparate and the only thing they have in common is that disgust was active. This demonstrates the wide range of disgust's effects and the complex ways in which disgust is at work in the world. Disgust's complexity and relevance to ways of being, doing, and knowing are a demand in themselves to attend to disgust as educators and scholars.

Locating Disgust in Everyday Encounters

One of the first indications of disgust's complexity is its dual nature. The experience of disgust can combine both attraction and repulsion. Disgust can invite the desire or pull to "take another look," to linger for a moment longer, even while we feel loathing and aversion. My own experiences of disgust have consistently combined aversion with fascination. This tension shaped my early understanding of disgust and motivated me to dedicate my graduate research to its examination. For example, as a child it was evident to me that, despite the foul smells and ghastly sights of the rotting raven carcass my friends and I had found in the ravine behind my house, we would, of course, poke the carcass with a stick, turn it over to examine it from every angle, all the while plugging our noses and loudly exclaiming "bleh!". Similarly, when my goldfish died after a month of swimming around with a growing lump on its left side—a sight that evoked the repulsion of many of my friends and family—it was not even a question that I would cut open the fish after it died to investigate the lump, disgusting as it may be. Despite this childhood dissection happening over two decades ago, I distinctly remember the physical

struggle of this moment; I remember feeling repulsed by the lump and the way it protruded to push and strain against the scales, yet, I felt driven to keep looking at the fish and to see if there was something even more disgusting inside the lump. After cutting into the lump, I was both disappointed and relieved to see only clear liquid inside and nothing more disgusting oozing from it. Yet, fascination took over and so I leaned in to smell the now dissected lump. Once again to my relief and disappointment, I smelled nothing.[2]

My raven and goldfish experiences speak to the duality, paradox, and ambiguity of disgust that present a challenge for understanding. This challenge is partly what makes disgust research important and pressing; rather than being "explained away" and dismissed as "irreducible paradox," disgust's complexities are "invitations to, even demands for, further theoretical reflection and/or […] exploration" (Orange, 2009, p. 129). I am drawn to disgust precisely because of its ambiguities and paradoxes because regardless of how poorly we understand them, these ambiguities, paradoxes, and dualities are central to the *experience* of disgust. Accordingly, to further develop an understanding of disgust, especially as to how and why it is such a demanding experience, requires attending to the complex, multifaceted, and, at times, puzzling elements of disgust.

[2] The feeling of disgust can endure even when we are no longer in the presence of a "disgusting" object, thereby attesting once again to its demanding nature. In recounting these experiences, the feeling of disgust is evoked in my body. There is no raven carcass or goldfish in sight, yet I hold my breath as I write, the corners of my mouth are pulled back, my lips tightly pressed together. All the while fascination lingers as I wonder in the back of my mind how that raven died, and whether a different method of dissection would have been more effective with the goldfish.

My encounters with disgust have also included more complicated situations with more serious consequences than the ones I have detailed thus far. In particular, I have witnessed the feeling of disgust translate into harmful actions towards others and these encounters have contributed to my need as a scholar and educator to attend to disgust. I would like to share one of my earliest experiences witnessing the ways in which disgust can motivate and lead to harm and violence. As a teenager growing up in the Greater Vancouver area, it was a popular Friday night activity to drive downtown to get away from the suburbs. The trip route involved driving through the Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood, an area known for its poverty and high levels of drug use, mental illness, and sex work. On one particular drive, I was sitting in the backseat of a friend's car as we headed down Hastings Street toward Vancouver's downtown. The scenery began to change and soon we were on the DTES stretch of Hastings. I watched as my friends rolled down the windows when we drove past DTES residents, many of whom appeared to us to be sex workers. My friends hung their heads out the window and began to shout insults at them as we drove past; the driver even slowed down to ensure that they would hear us and that we could get a better look at "them." These insults were primarily expressions of disgust: disgust at their appearance, their line of work, and their neighbourhood. I sat nervously in the backseat, laughing here and there, unsure of what to do or say. My nervousness turned to surprise and sadness when my friends pulled out a jar of pennies and began to throw them at the people they were yelling insults at.

Throwing pennies was an embodiment of the disgust my friends felt. Throwing pennies was an attempt to demean and degrade and was justified in their minds by the repulsion they felt. This encounter illustrates that disgust is not a by-product of

experience, or a result or consequence that follows experience, but is active in constituting the experience itself. In other words, disgust is “productive” in the sense that it produces ways of being and ways of doing; in the above encounter, disgust produced the boundaries that delineated “we” versus “them,” and shaped the actions taken by those involved. Most notably, disgust produced harm and for this reason, we—as educators, scholars, and people—must take seriously the ways of being and doing that disgust produces.

The harm disgust can engender is sometimes difficult to recognize given the ways in which disgust can operate under the auspices of “safety” and “health.” Disgust often relies on normative concepts of cleanliness and purity as a way to identify what is and is not disgusting and by extension, what is and is not safe and healthy. For example, expressions of disgust are sometimes used to teach children to wash their hands because germs and dirt are “disgusting” and can make them sick. Invoking or expressing disgust can also be a way to chastise children for wanting to touch or poke at excrement or even their own body parts. The use of disgust in these cases is intended to promote health and safety; however, disgust as a tool of “health” promotion can be a way to create and enforce oppressive social hierarchies and cause harm.

My experiences working at a DTES soup kitchen demonstrate the danger of using disgust to promote health and safety. My family volunteered at a soup kitchen throughout my teenage years. The work included welcoming DTES residents to the space, bringing them to a table when a seat became available, serving them a plate of food, clearing tables, and then handing out a bag of fruit and cookies as residents left. Even though I could not name it then, I felt deep discomfort with the “we” versus “them” dynamic at the

soup kitchen: “we” the volunteers, the not-homeless, the supposedly better/happier/healthier people versus “them” the homeless, everything “we” supposedly were not. I became hyper aware of anything that highlighted or exacerbated this dynamic. Accordingly, in the moments before the doors were opened and volunteers were frantically putting on disposable gloves and shoving extra pairs into their pockets, I decided I would not wear gloves while interacting with the residents. The gloves became symbolic of the we vs. them dynamic that I sensed already inherent in the soup kitchen structure. For me, the gloves communicated the messages “you are disgusting/dirty/diseased and I must protect myself from you” and “you are other and less than I.” The soup kitchen doors opened and residents began arriving. 15 minutes passed and a fellow senior volunteer pulled me aside. She asked why I was not wearing gloves. I cannot remember what I said in response, but I remember how she went on to chastise me. She then encouraged me to wear gloves at *all times* because “these people” had “all kinds” of diseases and germs and I “could get very sick.” As she said this, her brow was furrowed and the corners of her mouth were pulled back in an expression of disgust, her head shaking back and forth as if wanting to expel any reminder of these disgusting germs and diseases that were apparently prolific. I nodded, pulled on gloves in compliance, but walked away angry and confused. At the time, I could understand why I needed to wear gloves if I were handling food or doing dishes as I would in any food service context, but I could not understand why I needed to wear gloves when greeting people at the door, walking with them to their seats, or sitting down to have a conversation. I would certainly not wear gloves while doing these same activities in any other setting.

The use of disgust as health and safety promotion in this case served to create and enforce difference and otherness. Disgust was used as motivation to wear gloves, which in turn created and sustained a "we" versus "them" dynamic. The gloves became symbolic of this ostensibly irreparable divide between us and them. As this experience begins to demonstrate, the creation of oppressive dynamics, social hierarchies, and otherness is part of the harm that disgust can engender even when it is seemingly in service of "positive" goals such as health and safety. This soup kitchen example reflects Megan Boler's (1999) assertion that "Emotions are a primary medium through which we learn to internalize ideologies as commonsense truths" (p. 32).

Locating Disgust in Educational Encounters

Disgust is therefore more than an epistemological question. It is quite properly an educational concern. It raises questions such as: what kinds of knowledge does disgust serve to construct? What do we learn and teach through disgust? What is disgust's relationship to truth, justification, belief, and ideology? Disgust's relevance to educational settings is even more concretely illustrated in one of my own schooling experiences as a student. Similar to my soup kitchen and DTES penny encounter, I witnessed how feelings of disgust could be used as a tool in determining who was important and accepted/acceptable at school. I was in a three-grade split class and knew my classmates well as we were a Montessori cohort that had grown up together in the program. Given the rainy winters, there were many lunch hours that the class stayed inside to eat at our desks. There was one student who did not have many friends and was often teased and actively ostracized by the rest of the class. What is particularly noteworthy for my purposes, however, is that the teasing was focused on disgust with

what this student ate at lunch. This student had the same lunch every day—a 12 pack of raw hot dog wieners—and our classmates expressed daily how "gross" this meal was and that this student was "disgusting" for eating it. This disgust was not only the motivation and content of the teasing during lunch hour, but it also became justification for the student's ostracization generally. The disgust felt toward the act of eating raw wieners became disgust about the student *as a person*. As a result, no one wanted to sit near this student, work or play with her, or interact with her any more than necessary, all on account of her eating "disgusting" food. This treatment extended beyond lunch hour and became *the* way that this student was treated, whether she was eating hot dogs or not.

In expressing disgust toward this student's food and her as a person, a classroom structure and dynamic was created where this student was "other" and did not belong. Feelings of disgust shaped and determined what this student's schooling experiences looked like every day. It shaped her sense of self and her interactions with her peers. As Ann Ferguson (1991) argues, "affective production, or the production of people" should not be conceptualized "as a process of occurring in a place or realm different from that where the production of things takes place" (p. 68). For education, this can be interpreted to mean that knowledge production and affective production are simultaneous (Boler, 1999) and therefore that "affective production occurs even in the most sterile and rational classrooms" (Boler, 1999, p. 15). Consequently, as an educator I am called to attend to the ways in which disgust is active in producing knowledge and in producing people, both inside and outside the classroom.

In order to frame this introduction, I will share one last anecdote that demonstrates the importance of attending to disgust in educational settings. During my

doctoral studies, I worked for three years as a Teaching Assistant in an undergraduate course on social issues in education. This course focused on social justice matters, especially racial and cultural justice. It invited students into a personally and intellectually difficult examination of their own experiences, biases, and prejudices. Throughout these examinations, I encouraged students to consider emotions as places of knowing and of knowledge and therefore worthy of critical questioning, a process I called "following the rabbit hole of your gut."

As students read about, debated, and examined social issues in education, expressions of disgust were not unusual in tutorial discussions and weekly written assignments. One student recounted a schooling experience as a child in a small town in northern Ontario. The student remembered how in Kindergarten, he had a classmate that was constantly teased for being "smelly," dirty, and "disgusting." The student wrote in their weekly writing assignment about how the teased child would hide under a desk while classmates would point at him, shout "ew!" and run away plugging their noses. It was not until taking this university education course that my student began to see the connection between this disgust-focused teasing and structural forms of oppression. As these connections formed, my student shared that the teased child was the only person of colour in an otherwise white classroom. This fact had been insignificant to my student previously, but by attending to social justice issues through the course readings and to disgust through my invitation to "follow the rabbit hole of your gut," my student came to a recognition of the complex racial and cultural prejudices that were active in the teasing of this child. This student painfully described the moment he realized that calling this child disgusting and treating this child as if they were disgusting and dirty was a form of

racial violence that maintained social and institutional structures of oppression and discrimination.

This student's experience made it apparent to me that I had to attend to feelings of disgust, rather than dismiss or shame students for feeling disgusted. Feelings of disgust were not only constitutive of how this student treated a fellow classmate as a child, they were also a part of how the young adults in my tutorials approached and interpreted concepts such as prejudice, bias, oppression, and social justice. In other words, disgust creates meaning and can contribute to how we understand and make sense of our experiences and of the world. Perhaps most significantly, disgust can shape how we treat others. In order to understand human experience, including interpersonal and social experience, educators should think deeply about the ways that disgust shapes what we know and how we know, and how disgust impacts the actions we take in the world. Disgust's impacts are real, lived, and felt.

I am not satisfied with dismissing disgust as a by-product of experience. I have both experienced and witnessed disgust as a way of making meaning and as a way of causing harm. I therefore feel the need to recognize disgust as *productive* of experience, rather than merely resulting from experience. We feel disgust and are disgusted in daily life. At times, this disgust includes being disgusted by other people and can lead to aggression, violence, and harm. Disgust is therefore a forceful and demanding experience, both experientially and intellectually, and my research aims to sit with that demand and to ask the following central questions: how can we live with disgust, yet continue to treat one another well? How we can acknowledge disgust and continue to build schools, communities, and worlds that uphold equality and justice? How do we

construct practices and policies that acknowledge emotion as a legitimate, significant, and constitutive force in the world? As I have begun to suggest, disgust is active in a wide range of situations and circumstances and its meaning and impacts are complex. My interest in disgust is consequently broad; I see disgust research as important for not only specific educational contexts such as schooling practices and curriculum, but also for the more extensive definition of education as human development, learning, and change across lifetimes and beyond specific settings such as classrooms.

Current Disgust Research

Despite how familiar, common, or ordinary disgust experiences can be in daily life, it has remained challenging to address both theoretically and in our personal interpretations of disgust experiences. This is also true of research in education. As Shutz and Pekrun (2007) highlight, despite recognition among teachers and scholars of the "emotional nature" of classrooms, inquiry into emotions in educational contexts has been slow to progress. Accordingly, disgust has been under-researched in education. William Miller (1997) argues that disgust is difficult to write about as it demands discussing "unmentionables" that "undercut certain pretensions and pieties" (p. ix). Others have described disgust to be "the darkest of all the senses," thereby making its exploration equally dark and difficult (Mendelssohn, qtd. in Menninghaus, 2003, p. 38). Whether it is because of this "darkness," or whether disgust research is avoided because it is "simply" disgusting (Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 2009, p. 11), disgust has only recently been the focus of sustained research efforts. For example, Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley (2009) highlight that disgust did not become a topic in psychology research or teaching until the last decade of the twentieth century; in fact, it was "almost absent" prior to this (p. 10).

Along these lines, Olatunji and Sawchuk (2005) found little to no articles on disgust in psychological research databases prior to the 1990s. Similarly, the first academically focused book on disgust—William Ian Miller's *The Anatomy of Disgust*—was not published until 1997.

The lack of research attention on disgust began to shift in the 1990s in part because of the "affective turn" that took place in the social sciences and humanities. The affective turn signalled a contemporary increase in attention to emotion and affect across disciplines. It also incited debates on the difference between affect and emotion. The debates have served to distinguish and delineate disciplinary lines and these debates continue to unfold in the affect literature today. In brief, these discussions tend to center on defining emotion as a personal, conscious expression of feeling that is captured by language (Boler, 2015), while affect refers to non-conscious, autonomous "intensities" (Boler, 2015; Massumi, 2002). Though it is beyond the scope of my dissertation to enter these debates, it is worth noting that I use "emotion" and "affect" interchangeably to describe disgust. This stems from my agreement with Greco and Stenner's (2013) argument that

> Drawing an overtly sharp (and value laden) distinction between affect and emotion serves, paradoxically, to perpetuate the illusion that such words refer unproblematically to states of the world, thus bypassing the need to think carefully about the conceptual issues at stake. (p. 11)

Distinguishing between whether disgust is an emotion or an affect does not serve my purpose of exploring what disgust *does* as its effects are distinguishable regardless of the disciplinary terms attached to it. Regardless of these debates, the affective turn brought

many of the “negative” emotions to the forefront of research.[3] Consequently, disgust began to appear as a topic of study in disciplines such as psychology, legal studies, critical theory, and philosophy.

Early research efforts on disgust were led by the discipline of psychology, especially the work of Paul Rozin, Jonathan Haidt, and their research associates. Rozin’s work on disgust has been so significant that he has been nicknamed the “father of disgust in psychology” (Rozin quoted in. Gorman, 2010, para. 5). Psychology research also includes the efforts of Andras Angyal (1941), Silvan Tomkins (1963), Rachel Herz (2012b), and Susan Miller (2004).

Psychology research on disgust upheld traditional approaches to emotion research focused on identifying core and universal human emotions. Consequently, research in psychology has been primarily directed towards identifying, classifying, and categorizing disgust (Haidt, McCauley, & Rozin, 1994; Rozin & Fallon, 1987). This has included significant efforts to identify what objects are “naturally” disgusting, the distinguishing facial features of disgust, and its physiological components (e.g., nausea). In other words, the study of disgust in psychology has been led by the research question; “what is disgust?”

The disgust research outside of the discipline of psychology is varied and widely distributed across disciplines. It is therefore difficult to distinguish a body of disgust literature as clearly as one can with psychology. In other words, there is not a series of

[3] For example, Elspeth Probyn’s (2005) work on shame in *Blush*, or Sianne Ngai’s (2009) *Ugly Feelings* that looks at emotions such as envy and irritation, among others.

texts in a single discipline outside of psychology that are developing as a unified body of literature on disgust. Accordingly, most of these accounts fall under the broader disciplinary umbrella of the "humanities" as they encompass English and comparative literature studies (Korsmeyer, 2011; Menninghaus, 2003; Ngai, 2009), philosophy (Kelly, 2011; Kolnai, 2004; McGinn, 2011) and cultural studies (Ahmed, 2004b). The lack of a unitary body of disgust literature is compounded by the fact that disgust accounts beyond psychological research often come up as ancillary topics, rather than sustained investigations of disgust per se. For example, disgust appears briefly in the work of thinkers as diverse as Nietszche (1990, 1993, 1996), Bakhtin (1984), Sartre (1964), Kant (1960, 1996), Bataille (1996), and Douglas (2003). Though these accounts provide insights into aspects of disgust, it cannot be said, however, that they proposed a theory of disgust, or that they were theorists of disgust.[4] Generally speaking, however, the disgust literature in the humanities has not attempted to identify or categorize disgust reactions or objects as the psychology research has, nor has the humanities literature been concerned with confirming whether disgust is a universal human emotion. The humanities literature has expanded on some of psychology's key understandings of disgust, and highlighted other aspects, such as disgust's connection to personal beliefs, and its social and cultural dimensions.

My research interest in disgust stems from three themes that arise in both psychological research and literature in the humanities. First, the shared understanding

[4] Notably, Wilfried Menninghaus' (2003) study of disgust, *Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*, is an attempt to read these theorists, among others, *as* theorists of disgust. Menninghaus' text is striking in its accomplishment of bringing such a diverse and vast range of works under the umbrella of disgust.

that disgust signals a threat of some kind, and therefore includes ideational factors that contribute to the assessment of threat; second, that disgust is related to moral and ethical matters; and lastly, that fascination can occur alongside repulsion in disgust. Even though these three areas are consistently identified in the literature, their meaning is debated. In some cases, like with fascination, elements of disgust are dismissed. For example, fascination has often been dismissed as a paradox, an oddity (Herz, 2012b), or in more extreme accounts, a form of masochism (Rozin & Schiller, 1980), and the way to insanity (McGinn, 2011).

Toward an Understanding of Disgust as Meaning-Making

My argument in its simple form is that disgust encounters matter—they can play a constitutive role in how we come to understand ourselves, others, and the world; in short, disgust operates in processes of what I will refer to as meaning-making. As varied and diverse as the accounts of disgust have been in psychology and the humanities, they have minimized how disgust can play a role in meaning-making at personal, interpersonal, and social levels. In other words, they have focused on trying to answer what disgust *is*, rather than what it *does*. Consequently, my research is motivated by the question, "What do emotions *do*?" My interest is on the *effects* of disgust once invoked. My focus is not on defining disgust definitively, nor debating what objects invoke disgust, nor on whether it is a universal experience. Disgust happens in response to a range of objects and situations, and therefore the more pressing question for me is to examine what disgust is doing when it arises and the impacts it is having. As Raymond Williams (1977) argues, feelings "do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures" (p. 133).

What does disgust *do* in the world?[5] My research will show that disgust has an impact on processes of selfhood, world-making, and ethics. I will argue that disgust encounters are not a residue or by-product of experiences, but rather, work to create structures of meaning about selfhood, interpersonal relationships, and the worlds we inhabit. These structures allow subjects to organize and understand their experiences. In short, disgust is about "meaning-making." My analysis will use feminist intersubjective perspectives to examine disgust as they provide a useful way to understand the relational aspects of disgust and the ways in which disgust impacts processes and forms of understanding. In particular, I apply Jessica Benjamin's approach to processes of recognition to draw out disgust's relevance to meaning-making.

Benjamin's work is an intersubjective theory of how selfhood develops, not a theory of emotion, or disgust. However, it is my view that analysing disgust from the perspectives offered by an intersubjective theory of selfhood can make the relational aspects of disgust apparent, and draw out its significance to meaning-making. An intersubjective theory of selfhood is particularly important in an analysis of disgust given that existing disgust research has an unacknowledged concept of the subject already at work: an intrasubjective concept of the subject. It is therefore central to my argument that a more comprehensive account of disgust requires an intersubjective consideration of selfhood because the intrasubjective view of selfhood is limiting. Consequently, my

[5] My assertion that "disgust *does* something" invokes J. L. Austin's (1975) philosophy of language. As the title of his Harvard lectures suggest, *How to do things with words,* Austin argued that words are not just indicative, but are performative. In other words, language is action and in speaking, we perform an action. It is this same understanding that I bring to my research. When we name something to be disgusting, it *does* something; it is not just the identification of a fact or a mere descriptor.

research brings disgust and a theory of selfhood together to make the work of disgust visible in ways that have not been possible in existing approaches.

Using Jessica Benjamin's intersubjective theory of recognition, I will argue that the experience of disgust is an affective moment in which the struggle for recognition plays out between two active subjects. Through this process, subjects come to a sense of self, others, and the world. Given that Benjamin's approach has paradox and tension at its foundations, reframing disgust via her theory of recognition is one way to make the paradoxical elements of repulsion and fascination visible simultaneously. In doing so, we begin to move toward an understanding of repulsion and fascination as part of a process, rather than as separate and opposed phenomena. This understanding allows for a more comprehensive account of disgust's impacts, not only because it offers a third vantage point on disgust (not just repulsion or fascination, but repulsion *and* fascination), but also because it begins to correspond to what the lived experience of disgust can feel like: a demanding push and pull between repulsion and fascination, simultaneously occurring in the same moment.

I will argue that reframing disgust as a struggle for recognition is significant not only for acknowledging disgust's impacts on how we come to a sense of self, others, and the world, but for analysing disgust's ethical dimensions. By situating disgust as a process of meaning-making at personal, interpersonal, and social levels, the *range* of ethical questions and the reach of disgust's impacts widen. The ethical question would no longer be just about personal feelings in response to inanimate objects of disgust, but about our responsibilities to one another intersubjectively and to the communities and societies we live in and construct. Consequently, theories of disgust must be considered

anew, and indeed *can* be imagined anew. This reconsideration must not focus solely on repulsion—or begin with repulsion and try to "fit" fascination into the model afterwards—but must instead consider the simultaneity of repulsion and fascination as they arise in the disgust encounter, taking both as legitimate elements of the experience.

My argument therefore suggests that there are ways to "do" disgust differently because the stories we tell about disgust in our daily narrative accounts and in our theorizing *matter*. These stories matter because they are constitutive of experience and of how we make sense of our experiences in the world. These stories also inform and shape the actions we take toward others, especially when we feel disgusted by them. Expanding the theoretical and conceptual resources we have around disgust are therefore relevant not only for how disgust can be experienced, but for the ways in which we live our daily lives, especially among and with other living, feeling, thinking subjects in the world. Expanding our understanding of disgust is therefore an ethical question and demand.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter one

I begin my analysis of disgust by providing a limited survey of how disgust is currently understood in psychological research and in the humanities literature. My aim in chapter one is not to define disgust conclusively, but to indicate some of the general themes that have arisen across disgust research. The objective of this chapter is to do a limited literature review in order to highlight that much of the current research is unable to address my purposes—demonstrating disgust's relevance to processes of selfhood, world-making, and ethics.

Before looking at the research in these specific disciplines, I begin my discussion of disgust with a first-person narrative of a disgust encounter. My personal narrative is intended to embed my analysis in the everyday embodied experience of disgust. Disgust encounters unfold in the everyday and the "ordinary"—an analysis of disgust should begin here as well.

From this narrative, I turn to examine research in psychology that constitutes some of the earliest disgust research and thereby gives a sense of how conceptualizations of disgust have developed and changed over time. I consider early explanations of disgust as a food-rejection mechanism, as well as psychology's focus on identifying universal forms of disgust and universal objects that elicit disgust. I also highlight the ways in which the conceptualization of disgust as a food-rejection mechanism developed in the psychology literature to include other ways that disgust "protects" the body.

Following my consideration of the psychology research, I turn to a thematic analysis that incorporates research from both psychology and the humanities. I focus my discussion on prominent themes, rather than examining existing disgust research along strict disciplinary distinctions. First, I consider the ways that disgust is theorized as signalling a threat of some kind to the person experiencing disgust. I highlight the different ways that the nature of this threat has been conceived, as well as the connection between the element of threat and belief structures. In other words, I consider the ways that ideational factors impact the *perception* or assessment of threat when we feel disgusted.

The second theme in the current literature that I discuss is that disgust is implicated in moral and ethical issues. I illustrate that disgust's significance to moral

matters and judgements is consistently identified in the literature across disciplines. I highlight the different ways that disgust's moral stakes have been acknowledged, and discuss the ongoing debates in the literature as to whether disgust is a reliable guide in moral decisions and judgements.

The third theme that I identify and analyze is the acknowledgement that disgust has an element of fascination in its experience. I discuss some of the ways that fascination in disgust has been conceptualized in the current literature, including fascination as desire and pleasure, and fascination as threatening and perverse. I highlight that fascination is a poorly understood aspect of disgust despite ongoing recognition in the literature of its presence in disgust experiences. My discussion of fascination will also present my own approach to fascination that draws on Sara Ahmed's (2004b) characterization of disgust as a "push" and "pull" experience, with the "push" representing the element of repulsion and the "pull" representing the element of fascination.

From this thematic consideration, I move to a critique of existing approaches and detail three gaps that my research identifies and addresses. First, I will argue that intrasubjective approaches to selfhood and emotion have resulted in a lack of relational accounts of disgust. I discuss the ways that intrasubjective approaches to disgust rely on an "inside-out" model of emotion that conceive of emotion as a private, inner experience (Ahmed, 2004b). In this model, emotions are thought of as beginning inside the subject and *then* moving out towards others who can, and do, respond to them. I will suggest that framing disgust intrasubjectively leads to an over-emphasis on one active subject who feels disgusted towards an object of disgust. As a result, disgust accounts have

overlooked the possibility of disgust being a relational, *inter*subjective experience that occurs between two or more active subjects.

The second gap I identify in the existing literature is the inability to make sense of fascination in disgust, especially as to how and why it occurs alongside repulsion. I highlight the ways that the existing literature has dismissed fascination. I will argue that the inability to understand fascination is related to the lack of a relational, intersubjective account. In a relational framework, fascination—as connection, interest, or being compelled—can become intelligible in ways that are less possible in existing approaches to disgust. Accordingly, I argue that a more comprehensive account of disgust in which both fascination and repulsion are visible requires an intersubjective approach.

Taken together, these oversights contribute to the third gap I have identified: how disgust's ethical implications have been conceived and addressed. Despite the acknowledgement that disgust can motivate harmful actions toward others, current accounts of disgust have been limited in explaining *why* the feeling of repulsion can lead to harmful actions or behaviours. Furthermore, the lack of understanding about the reasons why disgust can motivate harmful actions has constrained imagining and implementing actions to mitigate and address these harms.

My analysis includes a consideration of some of the main attempts in the existing literature to address disgust's ethical demands. I focus particularly on Martha Nussbaum's (2004, 2010) call for a "politics of humanity" as the way to mitigate the harm that disgust can cause. I critique Nussbaum's approach, especially for the ways in which it dismisses fascination and results in vague recommendations for addressing disgust's potential for harm. From this critique, I will argue that the limited ethical

accounts of disgust are, in part, because current approaches have not analyzed disgust intersubjectively, have dismissed fascination, and have not considered disgust as relevant to the formation of selfhood or world-making. Thus, I will argue that acknowledgment of the underlying issues at stake in disgust encounters is necessary for understanding the ethical demands of disgust and for imagining viable, ethical responses to the harm that the experience of disgust can lead to.

Chapter two

In chapter two, I examine some of the social and cultural factors that have shaped current approaches to disgust. Namely, I will argue that mind/body dualism, especially in its Cartesian form, as well as Western traditions of individualism, and patriarchal power structures have been significant in shaping conceptions of subjectivity and emotion broadly, and disgust specifically. This chapter serves not only to account for the contexts shaping existing disgust accounts, but to situate the approach that I am proposing.

In my analysis of these contexts, I take up feminist critiques of how emotion and subjectivity have been understood and theorized in Western intellectual traditions. Though these critiques are well-established and some of the literature is two decades old, they have not been applied to the study of disgust specifically, especially not to the study of disgust as it relates to subjectivity. My discussion in chapter two takes up feminist critiques for two purposes; first, to analyze the contexts that have shaped current disgust accounts; second, to identify what a different approach to disgust could look like in order to address some of the gaps that have arisen from previous approaches.

I begin with an exposition of Cartesian dualism and of consequent feminist critiques. I argue that the radical separation of mind and body as mutually exclusive has contributed to disgust accounts over-emphasizing the corporeal and embodied elements of disgust experiences. This over-emphasis, however, has been accompanied by a devaluing or a mis-valuing of the corporeality of disgust as a signal of its "primitive" and basic nature. I will suggest that this devaluing is because the notion of the body that is operative in disgust accounts is the *Cartesian* view of the body: not only epistemically insignificant, but needing to be cleared away. Furthermore, I propose that the lingering legacy of Cartesian dualism in current disgust accounts contributes to the lack of efforts to understand disgust's relationship to processes of selfhood and world-making. Cartesian dualism aligned emotions with irrationality and corporeality and consequently, emotions were considered interference to knowledge and truth. This legacy makes it difficult to account for disgust's work in meaning-making.

From this, I turn to consider the impacts of Western individualism on current conceptualizations of disgust. Specifically, I argue that there has been an operative, yet unacknowledged concept of the subject already at work in disgust theories: the Western ideal of the autonomous individual. My analysis will suggest that this has resulted in disgust theories minimizing its relational elements as they oppose the ideals of individualism, while simultaneously emphasizing the element of repulsion as it aligns with these ideals. This has meant that fascination has been de-emphasized and poorly understood. Fascination, as a pull towards others and the world, signals the traits and experiences that individualism renounces: connection, attachment, and dependence. Therefore, disgust accounts have not been able to make sense of fascination because of

the unacknowledged ideals of individualism that have been operative. This is significant in that it highlights the need for a different account of subjectivity in order to have a different account of disgust.

The third social context that I consider is the impact of patriarchal power on disgust theories. I consider feminist critiques that demonstrate that Cartesian dualism and Western individualism have been a disavowal of the "feminine." These critiques highlight that this disavowal has been about power: to serve the political, social, and economic interests of patriarchal western society. I apply these critiques to the ways disgust is often understood and consequently argue that many of the current views of disgust are *masculinized* views that foreclose the possibility of attending to fascination, connection, and relationality as they are historically "feminine" concepts. This conclusion is relevant in moving towards a different account of disgust, one not founded on an ideology of patriarchal power.

My consideration of the social and historical contexts that have shaped disgust discourse is important for developing a different approach to theorizing disgust. Accordingly, in the last section of chapter two I argue that a feminist politics of disgust that builds on earlier conceptualizations of a feminist politics of emotion (Boler, 1999) provides an alternative approach to researching disgust. A feminist politics of disgust would situate disgust as relevant to how we understand ourselves, others, and the world and to how we conceive and practice ethics. It does this by challenging the historical disavowal of "feminine" ideals in Western thought, by locating emotion as central to processes of meaning-making (including processes of selfhood), and accounting for the ways that emotion intersects with power. I close chapter two by providing a brief

overview of what my understanding of a feminist politics of disgust would entail and how it challenges the three contexts I critique earlier in the chapter.

Chapter three

In chapter three, I take up Jessica Benjamin's theory of recognition to analyze disgust experiences. I use Benjamin's perspectives on recognition to re-frame disgust experiences as intersubjective processes in which selfhood is struggled for, and meaning-making happens.

Before applying Benjamin's approach to an examination of disgust, it is necessary to give an exposition of Benjamin's theory of recognition. I therefore begin the chapter by situating Benjamin's work in the broader context of psychoanalytic research and outline the strengths of her approach for my analysis of disgust. Given that Benjamin's work is related to G.W.F Hegel's master-slave dialectic, I also give a brief overview of Hegel's dialectic and highlight how Benjamin's interpretation differs from Hegel's.

I then move to an exposition of the central aspects of Benjamin's approach to recognition. My discussion centers on Benjamin's emphasis on tension in processes of recognition, and on how she forefronts breakdown in relationships. I also consider Benjamin's arguments for the possibility of mutual recognition and her position that mutual recognition is possible through the co-construction of "thirdness," even after a relationship fails or experiences breakdown.

After considering the main tenets of Benjamin's approach, I analyze disgust using these key ideas. I examine repulsion and fascination individually and reframe them in a recognition framework. I argue that disgust is an affective moment in which the struggle

for recognition plays out between two active subjects. More specifically, I suggest that the experience of repulsion in disgust is the push of needing to establish ourselves as autonomous and separate subjects, while simultaneously being pulled in the experience of fascination towards something beyond the self, towards connection and interest with what exists beyond the singular, closed subject.

After considering repulsion and fascination separately, I then consider the relationship between repulsion and fascination. In other words, I analyze repulsion and fascination *alongside* one another, rather than as separate, distinct, and opposed phenomena that happen to occur in the same experience. This aligns with my purpose of looking at the work disgust does and this cannot come into focus until repulsion and fascination are considered in tandem. When repulsion and fascination are considered together, they become intelligible as parts of a process—the struggle for recognition.

I will suggest that by reframing disgust via the concept of recognition, it becomes possible to analyze disgust as a subject-subject encounter. It thereby becomes conceivable to imagine more than one active subject in the encounter. In this reformulation, even those that that are named "disgusting object" can be understood as active subjects in a disgust encounter. Accordingly, my analysis in chapter three also explores the position of the "disgusting" subject. I take up Jean-Paul Sartre's work on the concept of the look to analyze this position. In particular, I examine the impact that a "look of disgust" could have on a subject. Using Sartre, I ask, what does being seen *as* disgusting mean for me? I suggest that what the look of disgust reveals is that I do not only exist "for-myself," but also "for-the-other." In other words, the look of disgust shows me to be a relational being that I am not the absolute master of. Sartre's concept of

the look is significant for understanding disgust as it supports my argument that disgust is active in processes of selfhood. It highlights that there are effects on *all* subjects involved in disgust encounters, not just on the one who is disgusted.

In the latter half of chapter three, I build on my re-framing of disgust as a struggle for recognition toward a re-imagining of disgust's ethical question and implications. My re-imagining is two-fold. First, I analyze the role of fascination in disgust encounters differently than current approaches. I will argue that a conception of disgust that considers fascination to be a paradox, or an unspeakable horror in the disgust experience, leads to inadequate answers to the ethical question. Indeed, if repulsion is the main or central element of disgust, then the answer to "how ought I to treat another when they disgust me?" will likely be to push away (physically, emotionally, mentally) any reminder of the other, or to deny any feelings of disgust. Both are, in my view, a denial of our ethical responsibility to others. If, however, space can be created conceptually and tangibly for fascination (in all its various forms) in disgust experiences, then different responses to feeling disgusted are possible as they are no longer founded on repulsion alone. I will argue that this is a viable beginning to imagining and enacting our ethical responsibilities in the face of disgust.

Second, I re-imagine disgust's ethical question through an application of Benjamin's concepts of breakdown and thirdness. I outline Benjamin's main tenets of thirdness—acknowledgment, responsibility, and agency—and explore whether these are possible in disgust encounters. I suggest that both breakdown and thirdness are key concepts in furthering an understanding of disgust's ethical demands and how to address them. I use Benjamin's approach to argue that there are possibilities for repair, shared

understanding, and mutual recognition in disgust encounters. These are, in part, founded through an attending to fascination. I suggest that creating thirdness is possible in disgust encounters by acknowledging our own responsibilities and capacities for causing harm in disgust encounters, witnessing that injustice and harm have been caused because of disgust, and lastly, by witnessing the harm caused to *all* those impacted by disgust encounters. Along these lines, I will argue that our *theorizing* of disgust must act as a witness so that the effects, impacts, and potential harms of disgust—on selfhood, intersubjective relations, and worldmaking—can be acknowledged.

Chapter four

Chapter four is dedicated to a case study of Ashley Smith's imprisonment and death in light of the approach to disgust I have proposed. Ashley Smith died in 2007 while in federal custody at the Grand Valley Institution for Women (GVI-W) in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. She died from self-inflicted strangulation while correctional officers watched. The COs had been ordered not to enter her cell in part because of the history of "disgusting" incidents wherein Ashley would smear feces, throw urine, and spit. My analysis of this case study signals at what repulsion and fascination can signify when disgust is configured as a meeting of two subjects, rather than a meeting between a disgusted subject and a disgusting object. I will argue that the disgust encounters that unfolded between Ashley and the penal institution were more significant than what may initially be assumed—they contributed to the circumstances that led to her death. This significance becomes evident when we analyze the disgust encounters from a relational

framework via Benjamin, and as encounters that were relevant to processes of selfhood and meaning-making.

I begin my analysis by giving a brief overview of the specifics of Ashley's case. Given that my aim is to analyze disgust specifically, I focus on the details of disgust encounters that took place between Ashley and the institution. My discussion also includes a brief consideration of disgust encounters in Canadian prison settings more generally. Though there is not much research done on this area, my discussion highlights that Ashley's circumstances were not unusual.

I then turn to analyze the institution's actions and responses to Ashley. I frame the institution as the "disgusted subject" and examine the institutional decision to segregate Ashley following disgust encounters, and their employment of security-focused interventions. My analysis interprets these actions and encounters using the approach to disgust via Benjamin that I detailed in chapter three. I will argue that the institutional responses to Ashley were not to Ashley as a subject, but rather to Ashley as a "disgusting" and threatening object. I will suggest that segregating Ashley, relying on security-based interventions, and ordering staff not to enter her cell if she was breathing were attempts to objectify Ashley in order to establish the institution as an independent, autonomous, and omnipotent subject. As a result, there was a breakdown of mutual recognition that led to an "unresolved opposition" between Ashley and the institution (Benjamin, 2018, p. 24).

After examining the institution's responses, I consider Ashley's position as the "disgusting subject" in the struggle for recognition. My analysis focuses on two aspects. First, I consider Sartre's concept of the look in light of Ashley's journal entries to

question what Ashley may have experienced in being looked at with disgust by the institution. I will argue that Ashley's journal entries were indicative that disgust encounters could have contributed to the ways in which she understood herself.

Second, I consider Ashley's use of disgusting objects, by which I mean her smearing of feces, throwing of urine, and spitting. I suggest that Ashley's use of disgusting objects can be re-interpreted as a struggle for recognition in that they were attempts to elicit a response from others. In the struggle for recognition, the response from the other is what can make the self's experiences, actions, and intentions meaningful (Benjamin, 1988). Framing Ashley's actions in light of this struggle provides a different interpretation of her actions and their significance.

Lastly, chapter four considers whether fascination was locatable in the disgust encounters that unfolded between Ashley and the institution. I will argue that fascination was present in Ashley's use of disgust objects as it was a pull towards others, a reach for staff and management to react and respond to her. Given that my approach suggests that it is critical to identify moments of fascination as they signal the possibility of responding to disgust encounters in ways that are not motivated by repulsion alone, chapter four accordingly considers whether there could have been alternative responses or outcomes to the disgust encounters that unfolded between Ashley and the institution. Using Benjamin's concept of thirdness, I will suggest that there indeed could have been different outcomes and that these possibilities are evidenced by moments of fascination that signalled opportunities for attunement between Ashley and the institution.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, I consider the central conclusions of my research. I identify two key areas: my research provides a social and relation account of disgust and thereby exposes the work of disgust and secondly, my research expands an understanding of disgust's ethical demands. From this discussion, I examine two possible limitations of my arguments. First, I consider and address the argument that not all disgust encounters involve fascination and that consequently my approach to disgust as a struggle between repulsion and fascination is unsuitable. Second, I address the concern that disgust cannot be figured as a struggle for recognition or meaning when it is evoked by an inanimate object, rather than a subject.

In the latter half of the conclusion, I discuss four areas of relevance for my arguments and the future avenues of research that they invite. I consider the significance of my arguments for feminist scholarship on emotion, especially for its efforts to reclaim emotions from the Western epistemic tradition that has dismissed emotion. Second, I discuss the relevance of my conclusions for educational theory and practice and highlight the importance of my conclusions for epistemology, curriculum, and for the daily lived realities of classrooms and school environments. Third, I examine the relevance of my arguments for therapeutic practices, especially for its potential implications for reconciliation and healing programs, the restoration of relationships, and for mental health. Lastly, I consider the importance of my arguments for correctional institutions and discourses, especially for the ways in which correctional institutions and their corresponding practices and policies view subjectivity and selfhood.

A Method for Reading—Invoking Disgust

Before turning to my analysis, I would like to invoke your disgust as the reader. I am intentional in this because I align my work with feminist critiques of epistemology that have shown that the ideal of "dispassionate investment" in research is a myth (Jaggar, 1989). As Alison Jaggar (1989) argues, "emotion is vital to systemic knowledge" (p. 165). Consequently, our examination must stay rooted in disgust because it is a place of knowing. It must stay rooted in the embodied, lived feeling of disgust, to both the push of repulsion and the pull of fascination, and not just to an abstract, removed idea or definition of disgust.

I therefore encourage you to take a moment before continuing to imagine something that disgusts you, or to recall an encounter where you felt strong disgust. Relive the smells, the sights, the feeling in your gut. Recall what thoughts crossed your mind, and what you wanted to do in response. Pay attention to what you feel now as you are recalling this moment.

As I will work to show in this dissertation, our sense of self is invested in the experience of disgust, in the churning of the stomach, the seizing of the throat, the grimacing of the face, the pull to look or smell again. And that is exactly how I wish for you to read—with disgust, alongside disgust, passionately invested in disgust.

Chapter 1.

Mapping the terrain: Approaches to Disgust in Western psychology and thought

> *The [emotional] process almost always begins before the name and almost always continues after it. The realization of the name [of the emotion] undoubtedly changes the feeling, simplifying and clarifying. (Ellsworth, 1994, p. 193)*

Despite the work of theorists across disciplines, disgust remains a difficult emotion to conclusively define. A dictionary definition of disgust seems straightforward:

> Strong distaste or disrelish for food in general, or for any particular kind or dish of food; sickening physical disinclination to partake of food, drink, medicine, etc.; nausea, loathing." ("Disgust, n.," 2017 n.p.)

Or, similarly,

> Strong repugnance, aversion, or repulsion excited by that which is loathsome or offensive, as a foul smell, disagreeable person or action, disappointed ambition, etc.; profound instinctive dislike or dissatisfaction. ("Disgust, n.," 2017 n.p.)

As these definitions attest, the general understanding of disgust is that it is a negative experience marked by repulsion and loathing. These definitions also suggest that the objects that elicit disgust are identifiable rather easily. Yet, research efforts towards defining disgust and identifying the elicitors of disgust have "raised more questions than

[they have] answered" (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, 2009, p. 24). Indeed, the surge in disgust research that began in the late 1990s has been so varied in terms of methodology, guiding assumptions, and disciplinary aims that there is a "striking lack" of conceptual unity (Kelly, 2011, p. 24).[6]

My intention in this chapter is not to answer these questions definitively, nor to provide a unified definition of disgust experiences. Given that the focus of my research is on examining what disgust *does,* rather than what it *is*, my approach does not necessitate a fixed definition of disgust. Accordingly, the aim of my discussion in this chapter is to present some of the common themes that have arisen across the varied accounts of disgust, as well as to highlight important elements of disgust experiences that current accounts have overlooked or minimized. I focus on three themes: first, that disgust signals a threat of some kind; second, that disgust is related to moral and ethical issues; and third, that fascination is an element of disgust experiences, though it is poorly understood. These themes are not only the most consistently identified across research, they highlight disgust features that are important for an account of disgust's impact on processes of selfhood, world-making, and ethics. However, despite their importance in the literature, disgust accounts have struggled with central aspects of disgust experiences and the work it undertakes. Consequently, it is important to have a general understanding

[6] For a more comprehensive survey of current disgust theories, I recommend Daniel Kelly's (2011) book, *Yuck! The Nature and Moral Significance of Disgust*. Kelly provides an effective interdisciplinary account of psychological disgust research thus far. Winfried Menninghaus' (2003) study of disgust, *Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*, provides an impressive historical account of disgust. It spans disgust account across philosophy, literature, aesthetics, and cultural studies from the eighteenth century to the early twenty-first century.

of the disgust research thus far and its main features in order to identify aspects of disgust requiring further consideration.

My consideration of disgust does not begin with the established body of research; rather, I begin with a first-person narrative of one of my own disgust experiences. I wish to situate my analysis in the embodied experience of disgust and therefore, a narrative of disgust is an important place to begin my analysis. A personal narrative is also significant given that my research is positioned within feminist epistemologies that reclaim experience as a valid source of knowledge, and a valid way of knowing. My narrative is not intended to essentialize nor universalize disgust experiences, but rather, to attend to some of the feelings, thoughts, and experiences that can accompany a disgust encounter.

In my limited survey of the existing literature, I will draw on research in psychology, as well as research in the humanities, especially research in philosophy and critical theory, that has considered disgust directly as an object of study. Though these two areas of disgust research may seem unrelated or opposed to one another, they have lead classical and modern debates about the nature and operation of emotion.[7] They have also led current debates about disgust. The psychology research on disgust was one of the earlier attempts at understanding disgust and has provided some of the predominant modern conceptualizations of disgust (Herz, 2012b). The research in the humanities, especially in the areas of critical feminist theory (Ahmed, 2004b) and philosophy

[7] Interest in emotions "goes as far back as philosophy itself" (Solomon, 2003a, p. 3). Given that philosophical and psychological methodologies were not separate from one another as distinct disciplines until the 19th century, it is not surprising that these two fields have been at the forefront of emotion discourse and research. See Robert Solomon's (2003b) edited collection, *What is an Emotion? Classic and Contemporary Readings* for a collection of texts that capture the Western history of philosophical and psychological theories and debates on emotion.

(Menninghaus, 2003; W. I. Miller, 1997; Nussbaum, 2004), expands and responds to the psychology research; therefore, I use these two disciplines to draw out major themes in the disgust literature.

Accordingly, my survey speaks across disciplinary lines. Though this method may seem like I am conflating disciplines, this cross-disciplinary approach is intentional and necessary for a thematic survey of the disgust literature. This approach is especially necessary given that there is no unified body of literature on disgust aside from psychological research. Consequently, the disgust research in psychology will be the only discipline that I consider on its own. Given that the psychology literature represents some of the earliest dedicated investigations of disgust, examining it on its own provides a sense of how disgust research has developed and changed across its history. From this dedicated examination, I then move to a thematic analysis that includes research from *both* psychology and the humanities.

After considering current conceptualizations of disgust, I will demonstrate that they have overlooked or minimized important dimensions of disgust. My discussion will focus on three interrelated gaps. First, the inability to account for disgust as a relational, intersubjective experience that is relevant for processes of selfhood and world-making. This will include a consideration of Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject as Kristeva's concept of the abject and of processes of abjection represent one of the only approaches that links disgust objects to processes of selfhood. Consequently, I briefly consider Kristeva's theory in light of my own approach and explain why Kristeva does not inform my own analysis of disgust's impact on selfhood. Second, I examine the minimization or dismissal of fascination in current disgust accounts. This includes the inability to

conceive of how fascination can operate alongside repulsion. I will argue that the inability to account for fascination effectively is due to the first gap—the lack of a relational, intersubjective framework. And lastly, these first two gaps contribute to a limited and incomplete consideration of the ethical question in disgust. I now turn to give a first-person account of one of my own disgust encounters.

Locating the Embodied Experience of Disgust: A Personal Narrative

I have chosen to begin with a personal, first-person narrative of a disgust experience for two reasons. First, I locate my research within feminist traditions of epistemology that reclaim experience as a legitimate form of knowledge, and a legitimate way of knowing (Code, 1991, 2006; E. Grosz, 1993; E. A. Grosz, 1994; S. Harding & Hintikka, 2003, 2003). Consequently, my own experiences of disgust are relevant and legitimate for a study of disgust; they are not “interference” to the pursuit of knowledge as patriarchal Western epistemic traditions have purported them to be.[8] Second, as my discussion will detail further on, it is my view that current theorists of disgust (and as a result, theories) have minimized or distanced themselves from their own visceral, embodied, and uncomfortable experiences of disgust. As I will argue in more detail later in this chapter, this distancing has resulted in over-simplified arguments that disgust reactions should be cleared away in order to respond to disgust ethically. By speaking from my own experience of disgust, my aim is not only to give a phenomenological account of disgust, but also to enact the theory that I propose in my research and discuss later in this chapter:

[8] I discuss and critique the Western foundations of epistemology and their impact on the study of disgust in chapter two.

Personal and theoretical responses to disgust, to the ethical question it poses in every disgust encounter, must not become amnesiac to the churn of our stomachs, the pushes of repulsion, and the pulls of fascination.

My experience and narrative arise in a Western context. It bears the marks of my position as a white, middle-class, cisfemale, queer, able-bodied settler on unceded Indigenous, Coast Salish land.

It is Sunday morning and I am walking on a street in downtown Vancouver. In the evenings, this street is busy with people eating out at restaurants and seeing live music shows, nothing like the quiet that surrounds me now. My eyes are cast down as I walk, looking a few steps ahead of me. Suddenly, I get a faint whiff of something sour. Sewage? Garbage? I flare my nostrils and pull them downwards, furrowing my brow at the same time, not yet sure what the smell is and not sure how I feel about it. As I keep walking, the smell gets stronger and without thinking, my right hand comes up to my nose to try and intercept and block the smell with my fingers. I don't plug my nose however, I am still curious as to what the smell could be and where it is coming from. As the smell grows stronger, my eyes start to squint and my brow furrows in a grimace, as if trying to keep the smell from penetrating my face any further. The corners of my mouth pull downwards, and my shoulders start to pull to the side as if trying to pull me away from the smell. Then, I see it. In the doorway to a closed shop is a pool of vomit. It is impressive, both in volume and in how it has sprayed all over the door and entryway. I can see half-digested chunks of food in the vomit among the streaks of grey, orange, and yellow bile and mucus. I slow down as I approach; some part of me wants a closer look. My eyes dart over the chunks of food, wondering what they are and what their pre-

digested form may have been. The smell however, is overpowering at this point. It fills my nostrils, my mouth, my throat. I scrunch my nose and exclaim, "ugh! Gross!" I press my lips together and take the smallest gasps of air through my mouth. Yet, I find myself leaning in towards the pool of vomit, my body half turned away as I peer over my left shoulder. I am fascinated by the small rivers breaking off from the main pool, wondering how ill this person may have been to have led to such an episode and what might have happened to them afterwards. Even as I lean in with my upper body though, my one leg is pointed outwards, as if ready to run or pull away if the smell overtakes, or perhaps if one of the vomit rivers begins to approach my shoe. Finally, I cannot take the smell anymore as it feels lodged in the back of my throat and my own stomach is starting to feel queasy. I start to walk away but turn to take another look as I do. This last look however, makes me feel as if I, myself might vomit. A shudder passes over my neck and shoulders and I exclaim once more, "bleh," while sticking my tongue out, as if to purge the last remaining smell, taste, and sight.

The aim of my personal narrative has been to highlight the embodied and ambiguous nature of disgust. Though it is not my intention to analyze the details of this one disgust encounter, there are a few features that are worth highlighting. Many of the physical characteristics I raised—the furrowed brow, the scrunched-up nose, the feeling of nausea, the protruding tongue—are physical markers of disgust in both every day, colloquial experience, as well as in the research literature. My narrative also captures how repulsion can occur alongside fascination and the ambiguity this can cause. My body turned away, yet I physically leaned in toward the object of disgust; there was even a moment where I did both at once. I lingered, took another look and another whiff, while

still moving away. Fascination was also evident in my curiosity about what might have happened to lead up to this disgusting scene. I wondered about the person that vomited and the circumstances they may have faced. This curiosity occurred alongside my repulsion rather than separate from it.

Though my narrative is culturally and personally specific, many of the moments I detailed in my narrative are familiar and relatable; therefore, it may seem that defining disgust is a simple task. Yet, definitions have been varied and challenging to pin down. Consequently, the disgust research has been a "history of problems" (Menninghaus, 2003, p. 6). [9] In the next section, I consider some of the early ways in which disgust was conceived: psychology's definition of disgust as a food-rejection mechanism.

Early Research Efforts: Psychology's Conception of Disgust as a Food-Rejection Mechanism

Early research on disgust, especially in the discipline of psychology, was generally focused on identifying and classifying disgust. In other words, it was primarily guided by the traditional research question of "what is disgust?" The early and predominant answer to this question built on Darwin's (1998) work that claimed disgust to be a food-rejection mechanism that signalled biological pathogens that should be rejected (Rozin & Fallon, 1987; Rozin, Haidt, Imada, & McCauley, 1997). Consequently, disgust results in the experience of repulsion that then leads to withdrawal, oral rejection (e.g., vomiting,

[9] Menninghaus (2003) used this expression to describe his work of mapping the vast and complex body of disgust literature. He writes that bringing all the writers together into one book, including those that have mentioned disgust even briefly or in passing, creates a "history of problems" rather than a "history of concepts." In other words, accounting for disgust is a "problem-oriented configuration" (p. 6).

spitting, gagging, etc.), and avoidance (ibid.). As such, disgust was conceived as the "guardian of the body" as it led to the avoidance of pathogens and diseases (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2009, p. 12). Miller (2013) thereby names disgust as the "gatekeeper emotion" that not only keeps the undesirable away, but also protects "the good" believed to be inside (e.g., health, purity, etc.).

Research on disgust in psychology reflected psychology's approach to emotion more generally. Traditional work on emotion in psychology focused on identifying basic and core emotions that were considered hard-wired into individuals universally. This approach was initiated by psychologist Paul Ekman's (1992) research into emotions that was focused on identifying universal emotions—or what he called "basic" emotions. Disgust made it onto Ekman's list of "basic" emotions. In Ekman's taxonomy, basic emotions, such as disgust, anger, fear, sadness, happiness, and surprise, are universal in humans, have distinct facial expressions, and have some occurrence in nonhuman animals (ibid.). Psychology continues to uphold Ekman's classification of disgust as a "basic," universal emotion. This claim of disgust's universality aligned with Angyal's (1941) early assertion that disgust had only "minor cultural variations" in its features (p. 399). As research in psychology continued however, there was increasing recognition that disgust was related to social and cultural factors, especially in terms of what objects elicit disgust reactions.[10]

[10] Findings are currently mixed in terms of the universality of disgust in terms of its occurrence, as well as in terms of its specific features: facial expressions, objects that elicit disgust, ideational factors, etc. (Elwood & Olatunji, 2009).

Regardless of recognizing disgust's cultural and social factors, research in psychology has continued to focus on identifying universal forms of disgust. As a result of these efforts, psychological research has proposed the following markers of disgust: a characteristic facial expression (the gaping or retracted mouth, upper lip retraction, nose wrinkle, dropping of the mouth corners),[11] an associated action (distancing of the self from the offensive object), a physiological component (nausea), and a feeling state (revulsion) (Rozin & Fallon, 1987; Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 1993, 2000; Rozin, Lowery, & Ebert, 1994). However, none of these elements on their own is a necessary or sufficient condition for the experience of disgust and therefore, the ideational factors involved in disgust are necessary for distinguishing disgust from distaste, for example (S. Miller, 2004; W. I. Miller, 1997; Rozin & Fallon, 1987). I will discuss ideational factors later in this chapter as they are a shared feature of disgust research in both the disciplines of psychology and the humanities.

As psychological research continued, the categories of disgust expanded beyond food-rejection. Rozin et al. (2000) proposed "core disgust" to refer to disgust that is in response to objects that could be ingested, such as food, animal, and body products. In addition to core disgust, three other categories of disgust were formulated. "Animal-origin" disgust refers to disgust elicited by anything that reminds humans of our connection to animals, animality, and mortality such as raw meat or carcasses.

[11] William Miller (1997) argues however that the focus of orality and taste in the definition of disgust coincides with the introduction of the word 'disgust', meaning "dis-taste" or "offensive to the taste", into the English lexicon in the seventeenth century (W.I. Miller, 1997, p. 1). Miller believes that the etymology of the word "disgust," as well as the tendency of disgust research to focus on the *facial* expressions of disgust, has "misled" researchers into overemphasizing taste and the mouth in the phenomenology of disgust (ibid.).

"Interpersonal disgust" is elicited by both direct and non-direct contact with strangers or "undesirables" (Elwood & Olatunji, 2009), while "moral disgust" refers to disgust at moral violations (Rozin & Fallon, 1987; Rozin et al., 2009, 1994). The addition of these categories reflected the growing view in psychology that disgust not only protects the physical body's boundaries, but the boundaries of the self.

Rachel Herz's (2012b) work on disgust captures how the protection of the physical body's boundaries via food rejection can be a protection of the boundaries of the self. Herz complicates the idea that the most basic purpose of disgust is to prevent the ingestion of toxic and rotting food. Firstly, she highlights that most cultures have rotting foods that are considered a delicacy, such as kimchi or cheese, that others may find disgusting and refuse to ingest. This is indicative that in certain cases, disgust reactions at rotting food may serve more purposes than just the avoidance of pathogens. Herz demonstrates that policing what foods are ingestible via disgust reactions is linked to establishing cultural and ethnic identities. It is therefore not about what food is "naturally" toxic or disgusting because "we learn which foods are disgusting and which are not through our cultural heritage" (Herz 2012b, p. 7). In other words, determining appropriate foods is about determining social and cultural in and out groups and upholding cultural traditions. Herz (2012b) demonstrates that "prohibitions against consuming specific foods have a long history of being used to keep the 'wrong' people away" (p. 7). Examples of this include religious prohibitions like those banning the consumption of Gentile wine and food under the Roman Empire (Herz 2012b). This aspect of Herz's analysis is significant in that it provides a more complex picture of disgust even if it were just a food rejection mechanism. It not only blurs the distinction

between disgust protecting the physical body and disgust protecting the self, but it also demonstrates the social and relational work that disgust can undertake.

Psychological research on disgust has also attempted to identify what objects are "naturally" and "inherently" disgusting. This area of research has culminated in a 32-item "Disgust Scale" that measures disgust sensitivity across 7 domains of disgust elicitors: food, animals, body products, sex, body envelope violations, death, and hygiene (Haidt et al., 1994). This scale has become widely used (Rozin et al., 2009) and the "gold standard" for measuring personal disgust sensitivity (Herz, 2012b, p. 34). The Disgust Scale is interpreted as support for the theory of disgust proposed by Rozin and Fallon (1987) that has dominated contemporary psychology research on disgust. Though identifying universal elicitors of disgust is not my aim, my discussion will refer to traditionally disgusting or "primary" objects of disgust.[12] In doing so, I draw on Paul Rozin's classification of disgust objects into two categories: primary and secondary. Primary objects of disgust are those that "come to be disgusting (or rejected) without the necessary participation of other disgusting objects" (Rozin and Fallon, 1987, p. 35). These include objects such as bodily excretions, body parts, decay, spoiled food, and animal waste and products (Curtis & Biran, 2001; Elwood & Olatunji, 2009). Secondary objects of disgust require the participation of other disgust objects in order to be named as such. For example, a t-shirt would not be considered disgusting unless it had vomit on it. The t-shirt with vomit would be considered a secondary disgust object. Many of the

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[12] For discussions of what objects are may elicit disgust reactions, see Kolnai, 2004; Menninghaus, 2012; S. Miller, 2004; W. I. Miller, 1997; Rozin & Fallon, 1987; Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 1993; Rozin et al., 2000.

objects that are identified as disgusting in daily experience and conversation refer to primary disgusting objects as identified by psychology: feces, vomit, blood, rotting food, decay, and so forth.

Lastly, there has been an increasing trend in the psychology research to consider how disgust is active in psychological disorders and their treatment. Though this body of research does not serve my purposes here given its general tendency to pathologize emotion, it is worth noting that this is a growing interest in the research. For example, research has looked at disgust's relationship to phobias (Merckelbach, de Jong, Arntz, & Schouten, 1993), obsessive-compulsive disorder (McKay, 2006), eating disorders (Troop & Baker, 2009), and depression (Phillips, Senior, Fahy, & David, 1998). The research has considered disgust's implications for the etiology and assessment of disorders, and also its implications for the treatment of disorders (Meunier & Tolin, 2009).

Beyond Disgust as a Food-Rejection Mechanism: A Thematic Account of Disgust Research

I now turn to a thematic consideration of the disgust literature to highlight three elements of disgust that are consistently identified in research spanning both psychology and the humanities. First, the element of threat that disgust responds to; second, the link between disgust, morality, and ethics; and third, the element of fascination in disgust experiences.

Disgust as a signal of threat

The component of threat has been central to both psychological and humanities' accounts of disgust. Disgust has been characterized as an emotion that alerts to "the presence of something deemed a contaminant" (Nussbaum, 2004, p. 84). Biological and

psychological researchers have similarly argued that disgust works to protect both the body and soul from threats (S. Miller, 2004; Rozin et al., 2000). Regardless of the nature of the threat, or whether it is real or imagined, the element of threat at the centre of disgust encounters is significant. It marks the experience of disgust as a "state of alarm and emergency, [as] an acute crisis of self-preservation" (Menninghaus, 2003, p. 1).

Despite the shared understanding that disgust signals a threat of some kind, a significant difference between research in psychology versus the humanities is *what* constitutes the threat. Psychological researchers have argued that the threat comes in the form of harm to the *physical* body through objects such as germs, rotten food, and non-nutritious food (S. Miller, 2004; W. I. Miller, 1997; Rozin & Fallon, 1987; Rozin et al., 2000). This work broadened to comprise threats to the self-boundary (in terms of a "sense of self"), not just to the physical body, and came to include threats such as sex, hygiene, death, violations of the body "envelope," and socio-moral violations (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, 2000).

Disgust accounts in the humanities have had less demarcated definitions of what objects may signal a threat. Rather than adhering to strict categories, threat becomes defined by anything that presents "otherness." In other words, disgusting objects are those that seem "unassimilable" for the subject as they are too different or too "other" than the self (Menninghaus, 2003, p. 1). Susan Miller (2004) for example, outlines that the threats of disgust include "disturbing ideas and visions, immoral acts, and repellent people" (p. 4). Furthermore, the threat need not be "actually perceived," but can result from being "vividly imagined" (ibid.). Disgust has even been understood as signalling threats to a society's identity more broadly, or to the "social fabric" that encompasses

largely shared value systems, moral codes, and established ways of being a member of that society (Nussbaum, 2010). Along these lines, Leon Kass (1998) argues that disgust "warn[s] us not to transgress what is unspeakably profound" (p. 19). The threats that are possible under Kass' definition are far-reaching as they can encompass nearly anything that stands in opposition to what has been deemed "profound" – an identification that is flexible, constructed, and potentially problematic.[13]

Disgust has also been linked to existential crises. In Jean-Paul Sartre's (1964) account of disgust in his novel *Nausea*, the physiological nausea of disgust represents the philosophical questioning of existence, or a crisis of the self. Menninghaus (2003) argues that in Sartre's experience of physical nausea, he is perceiving himself and his existence as "radically threatened" (p. 356). The "groundlessness" that marks the feeling of nausea, where one experiences a reeling sensation of both self and world, represents a realization of the "groundlessness" of existence. In other words, "nausea signifies first of all a *violent crisis of ordinary self- and world-perception*" (emphasis added, Menninghaus, 2003, p. 356).

"Stickiness": The relationship between threat and ideational factors in disgust

Underlying the element of threat, regardless of what object signals it, is an assessment or conception of "badness" or "contamination" that results in the object being perceived *as* threatening. As Nussbaum (2004) highlights, "disgust is motivated primarily by ideational factors: the nature or origin of the item and its social history" (p. 88). Nussbaum argues that these ideational factors lead to "magical ideas" and "magical

[13] See Nussbaum's (2010) critique of Kass in *From Disgust to Humanity*.

thinking" about contamination and aspirations to purity in disgust experiences (p. 14). The magical thinking of disgust results in the belief that if the self gets too close, contacts, or ingests the object or substance viewed as disgusting, the self will become contaminated by the object's "badness" or "baseness" as a result (ibid.).

Recognition of the ideational factors operative in disgust is significant because it indicates that "It is the subject's *conception* of the object, rather than the sensory properties of the object, that primarily determines the hedonic value" (emphasis added, Rozin and Fallon, 1987, p. 24).[14] Accordingly, ideational factors are linked to the social history of an object, such as who touched it, and where the object has been (ibid.). In other words, when a subject feels disgusted by an object, it relies on a history that precedes the disgust encounter (Ahmed, 2004b). This history mediates the assessment of the object *as* disgusting, and therefore contributes to the experience of disgust. In psychological research, Rozin and Fallon (1987) have argued that ideational factors are only present in disgust and therefore, are important factors to distinguish disgust from distaste, which can elicit the characteristic facial expressions of disgust.

The ideational factors in disgust can also be understood through the metaphor of "stickiness" that Ahmed (2003) aptly suggests in her analysis of disgust. Disgust is literally and metonymically "sticky"; it brings objects, concepts, and subjects together. It is such an effective adhesive that the individual properties or meaning of objects brought together under disgust disappear under the "disgusting" label (ibid.). The ways in which

[14] This is, in part, one reason that I am not focused on identifying objects that elicit disgust, nor suggesting objects that universally do so, as the assessment of disgust operates at an individual level, and can be separate from the objective qualities of the actual object.

disgust sticks concepts, ideas, prejudices, and terms together, “allows them to be felt to be disgusting *as if that was* a material or objective quality” (original emphasis, Ahmed, 2004b, p. 88). As a result, the meaning of disgust can become difficult to trace as concepts and words have come to be associated through disgust’s ‘sticking power’ to the point of appearing to all mean the same thing: disgusting. For example, an individual who consistently has vomit on their clothing will acquire the label of “disgusting” because the vomit is “disgusting.” This label will apply to the individual’s entire being and is not limited to the vomit or to the item of clothing that has the vomit on it. This demonstrates how an inanimate, disgusting object can get linked to an animate *subject*, thereby rendering both “disgusting.”

This “sticky” phenomenon aligns with psychological research on disgust. Rozin and Fallon (1987) demonstrated a “law of sympathetic magic” to be operative in disgust. One of the principles of this law is that “the part is equal to the whole” so that the “disgusting” properties of a small part of an object are representative of the whole object (ibid). Furthermore, this law also means that contagion can occur from one part to a whole part (ibid.). This is demonstrated in the above vomit example in which the disgusting attributes of the vomit are contagious and stick, not only to the shirt it landed on, but to the entire person that is wearing the shirt.

Disgust is also sticky in the sense that the associations it links together tend to endure. For example, imagine stepping into dog feces. Your shoe is smeared with it and you feel yourself to be disgusting. You sigh in relief when you realize your shoes are washable and you throw them into the washing machine as soon as you arrive home. You carefully reach into the washing machine after the wash is done and see that no visible

trace of the feces is left on your shoes; in fact, they look brand new and smell like laundry detergent. Yet, you cannot bear to put the shoes on your feet again as they continue to be disgusting to you, just like the dog feces that once touched them. This example aligns with another principle of the "law of sympathetic magic," which is that once objects have been in contact with one another, they will continue to influence one another (Rozin and Fallon, 1987). Whether it is called "stickiness," or the law of sympathetic magic, disgust's power to adhere images, concepts, and words together is robust and difficult to undo.[15]

The moral stakes of disgust

As disgust research continued, a shared understanding emerged across disciplines of disgust's significance to moral matters, especially as disgust came to be seen as more than just a food-rejection mechanism. It was not a far reach to contend that the "bad taste" signalled by disgust could also be a metaphorical "bad taste" brought on by moral transgressions and judgements (Chapman, Kim, Susskind, & Anderson, 2009). Though it is beyond my scope to account for the vast body of literature around disgust and morality, I wish to signal its importance here by highlighting two features of the research literature. First, the wide-spread acknowledgement that disgust is relevant to moral, legal, and ethical domains. And second, the debate that follows as to whether and how disgust is an appropriate guide for moral, ethical, and legal decision making.

[15] Examples of disgust's adhesive strength are not limited to imagined scenarios or scenarios solved by a washing machine; they can and do include violent and horrific circumstances. Histories of mass violence, for example, have often included the language of disgust—references to filth, dirt, and diseased vermin—being used in propaganda to justify the murder of millions of people.

Disgust is a common, daily register for moral issues as "…we express many of our bread-and-butter moral judgements in the idiom of disgust" (W.I. Miller, 1997, p. 179). Accordingly, expressions of disgust figure in everyday conversations that touch on moral issues: "I can't believe he did that! It's disgusting!" or "Seeing them do that made my stomach churn." Yet, disgust can be "too zealous" in the moral work it undertakes as "it wants to draw things into the moral domain that we feel in our better judgement should be left out" (W. I. Miller, 1997, p. 181). W. I. Miller uses the example of vices to demonstrate disgust's over-zealousness. For example, gluttony and lust incite disgust and are therefore moralized into a vice (ibid.). As the discussion about the ideational factors of disgust began to suggest, disgust is not just the registering of repulsion towards an object, but intersects with notions of fairness, justice, the good, morality, and immorality. The question then becomes what to do with disgust's "moral life" (ibid., p. 179).

The nature, scope, and reliability of disgust in moral issues continues to be contentious (Fischer, 2016; W. I. Miller, 1997; Nussbaum, 2004; Plakias, 2013). One side of the debate is represented by Nussbaum's (2010) condemnation of disgust as a distorting and untrustworthy guide in moral and legal matters. She argues that disgust involves false and irrational beliefs because it is shaped by social norms, stereotypes, and prejudices. Consequently, disgust is at odds with the establishment of a society based on the equality of all citizens (ibid.). Nussbaum (2010) concludes that disgust "collaborates with evil" (p. 55).

Nussbaum is not alone in these sentiments. Other theorists are also "disgust sceptics" as Alexandra Plakias (2013) names them. Alongside Nussbaum, disgust sceptics have characterized disgust as "instrumenta[l] in oppressive and violent ways"

(Ngai p. 340), "too plastic" in structure to "anchor" moral evaluations (Knapp, 2003, p. 277), deserving of "no moral credence" (Kelly, 2011, p. 147), and too "fickle" to guide moral evaluations (Kekes, 1992, p. 438).

Opposed to the disgust skeptics are those that maintain disgust to be a useful guide in moral, legal, and ethical issues. Leon Kass (1998) expresses it perhaps the most strongly, claiming that disgust contains "deep wisdom, beyond reason's power to articulate it" (p. 18). For Kass (1998), the wisdom of disgust consequently "warn[s] us not to transgress what is unspeakably profound" (p. 19). Kass continues to uphold disgust reactions as the criterion for making decisions about pressing social issues such as human cloning and bioethics. Similarly, Lord Patrick Devlin (1959), a British lawyer, argued that disgust reactions signal threats to the shared moral code and as such, serve as a legitimate source of the law. More recently, Kahan (1998, 1999) has maintained disgust to be important in criminal sentencing, arguing that higher disgust reactions to the crime at hand should be accompanied by a higher sentence.

Though the debates continue, the connection between disgust and issues of morality, justice, and ethics is evident. My aim here has been to indicate the stakes of disgust; disgust *matters*. It matters not only for institutional practices such as law and politics, but for intersubjective and social relations, and for the moral judgements and actions we make and undertake daily.

The pull of disgust: Fascination

The third and final element of disgust I will examine is fascination. The presence of fascination alongside repulsion can be located in writings reaching as far back as Plato.

Plato's recounting of Leontius' encounter with corpses is notable in its telling of the pushes of repulsion alongside the pulls of fascination:

> Leontius, the son of Aglaeon, was on his way up to town from the Piraeus. As he was walking below the north wall, on the outside, he saw the public executioner with some dead bodies lying beside him. He wanted to look at the bodies, but at the same time he felt disgust and held himself back. For a time he struggled, and covered his eyes. Then desire got the better of him. He rushed over to where the bodies were, and forced his eyes wide open, saying, 'There you are, curse you. Have a really good look. Isn't it a lovely sight?' (Plato, 2000, p. 439E–440A)

As Plato's account of Leontius' encounter with corpses demonstrates, disgust embodies a struggle between the push of repulsion and the pull of fascination. As W.I. Miller (1997) aptly notes,

> Even as the disgusting repels, it rarely does so without also capturing our attention. It imposes itself upon us. We find it hard not to sneak a second look or, less voluntarily, we find our eyes doing "double-takes" at the very things that disgust us. (p. x)

Tracking disgust's duality across literature, cultural texts, and social practices is a fascinating exercise in itself. Though such a project could form a dissertation on its own, I would like to mention one particularly interesting phenomenon: ambergris. Ambergris is the "intestinal slurry" of sperm whales that is formed in response to a stomach or throat irritant and then ejected (Rizzo, 2012). This description is sure to evoke disgust reactions, yet ambergris is highly valued in the perfume industry where it is used to "fix scent to

human skin" (ibid.). In fact, it is so valuable that it can be worth thousands of dollars *per ounce* (ibid.). The duality of disgust is captured in Herman Melville's (1892) description of ambergris in *Moby Dick*.[16] He writes,

> Who would think, then, that such fine ladies and gentlemen should regale themselves with an essence found in the inglorious bowels of a sick whale! Yet so it is. […] Now that the incorruption of this most fragrant ambergris should be found in the heart of such decay; is this nothing? […] And likewise call to mind that saying of Paracelsus about what it is that maketh the best musk. Also forget not the strange fact that of all things of ill-savour, Cologne water, in its rudimental manufacturing stages, is the worst. (p. 386).

Melville's struggle with the simultaneity of fascination and repulsion is evident in this passage. It is a "strange fact" that is almost unthinkable ("Who would think…!").

Melville's struggle attests to the fact that even though fascination, or the "giddy enthrallment" of disgust (Herz, 2012b, p. 49), is consistently identified as an aspect of disgust experiences, it remains poorly understood. The difficulty of defining fascination in disgust is exacerbated by the fact that disgust seems to have a life of its own beyond our control; it is felt to "impose itself upon us," pushing us involuntarily towards that which also nauseates us (W. I. Miller, 1997, p. xi). This imposition can give the

[16] My thanks to Dr. Robyn Long for this excellent example of fascination and repulsion occurring in the same moment and in response to the same object.

impression that fascination is thrust upon us from the outside and as a result, the reasons for it are also outside of our understanding.

Fascination in disgust has been understood in some cases as related to desire and attraction, thereby suggesting a positive interpretation (Ngai, 2009). Even if fascination is related to "positive" experiences such as pleasure, desire, and attraction, it does not make it an easy or comfortable experience. This is arguably because desire and attraction seem at odds, or paradoxical to the feeling of repulsion. It seems fitting then that Carolyn Korsmeyer (2004) gave her examination of disgust the title of "Difficult Pleasures." The element of fascination, of desiring that which we find simultaneously revolting, is indeed difficult, both in experience and in theory. It is hard to understand why we want to look, smell, touch, and experience that which we find revolting; we should seemingly only want to get away from it as quickly as possible. In other work, Korsmeyer (2011) writes that disgust is an aversion reaction that can nevertheless lead to an experience of "savoring," thereby suggesting once again an element of enjoyment and pleasure (p. 3).

More often, however, fascination in disgust is characterized as threatening. In fact, it is seemingly so threatening that McGinn (2011) warns, "that way lies insanity or even worse" (p. 49).[17] Along these lines, fascination in disgust has been described as a "perverse attraction" (Herz, 2012b, p. xi), a form of "benign masochism" (Herz, 2012b,

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[17] Though it is beyond the scope of my discussion to engage with Jaggar's (1989) concept of "outlaw emotions," her discussion includes an interesting argument that relates to the characterisation of fascination as "the way to insanity" (McGinn, 2011, p. 49). Jaggar writes that, "When unconventional emotional responses are experienced by isolated individuals, those concerned may be confused, unable to name their experience; they may even doubt their own sanity" (p. 160). This indicates that creating processes and opportunities in which people can share, acknowledge, and validate experiences of fascination in disgust experiences may be meaningful for shifting the perception and feeling of fascination in disgust as a sign of "insanity."

p. 27; Rozin & Schiller, 1980). Even Plato's (2000) account of Leontius' disgust suggests that the desire to look at that which disgusts him is a curse, that leads him to curse his eyes for wanting to look again.

Sara Ahmed's (2004b) characterization of fascination in disgust is one of the most effective because it corresponds to the embodied feeling of repulsion and fascination. She describes disgust as ambivalent precisely because it involves an attraction to objects that are also repulsive. Ahmed's description of disgust's ambivalence centers on a metaphor of movement that renders this ambivalence as a *push* and a *pull* in disgust. Repulsion in disgust pushes us *away* from disgusting objects, "almost involuntary, as if our bodies were thinking for us, on behalf of us," while fascination pulls us *towards* disgusting objects, thereby "open[ing] us up to the bodies of others" (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 84).

This sense of movement is discernible in Leontius' encounter with the corpses in the passage I opened this section with (Plato, 2000). When Leontius "held himself back" and closed his eyes, we recognize the pull away from the disgusting object. Yet, Leontius then "rushed *over to*" the corpses, *towards* them, guided by the "curse" of desire and fascination. Plato characterizes this precisely *as* a struggle; the push and pull in disgust demands the exertion of effort. Leontius had to *force* his eyes open, even though he *wanted* to look again. The element of struggle caused by repulsion and fascination operating simultaneously in disgust is evident here.

These pushes and pulls are also recognizable in our personal accounts and reflections on disgust. Without much effort, we can recall instances where we looked again at what repulsed us, took another whiff, hesitatingly poked a finger at the disgusting object.

Similarly, we can easily recall the feeling in our bodies of these moments—the push away registered in the retreat of our head and shoulders, yet the pull towards felt in the turning of our chin, the flicker of our eyes towards the disgusting object. Ahmed's characterization of a push and a pull aligns with the embodied experience of disgust and therefore, informs my own view of disgust. Accordingly, I refer to "the push and the pull" of disgust frequently in my research and analysis. This is especially pertinent given the parallels I draw between the push and pull of disgust and processes of recognition. As I will discuss in chapter three, the struggle between the push of repulsion and the pull of fascination in disgust aligns with the struggle for recognition that involves a similar push and pull between independence and dependence.

Gaps in Existing Approaches to Disgust

Thus far, I have discussed two broad areas of disgust research spanning psychology and the humanities. I outlined how disgust was first understood in psychology as a food-rejection mechanism and then came to be understood as an emotion protecting the physical body, as well as the "self." My discussion also focused on three elements of disgust that have been identified in research across psychology and the humanities. First, the understanding that disgust signals a threat of some kind, including the ideational factors that contribute to the assessment of threat; second, that disgust is related to moral and ethical matters; lastly, that fascination is active in disgust.

As varied and diverse as the accounts of disgust have been, they have been less effective in addressing critical concerns with disgust. I have identified three significant oversights in current approaches to disgust and examine them in detail in the discussion

that follows. First, current approaches have not offered relational accounts of disgust and have therefore been unable to account for disgust as relevant to selfhood and world-making. Second, current accounts have been unable to understand why and how fascination operates alongside repulsion in disgust encounters. As a whole, these oversights have contributed to the third gap I identify and respond to: incomplete examinations of disgust's ethical implications, coupled with limited responses for how to meet disgust's ethical demands.

Lack of relational accounts: The "Inside-Out" model of emotions

The prevalent characterizations of disgust are based on a model of emotions premised on the assumption of interiority (Ahmed, 2004b). In other words, emotions begin inside the subject and *then* move out towards objects and others, who can, and do respond to them. Emotions and emotional responses are therefore a matter of "the inside getting out" (White, G.M., 1993, p. 29). White (1993) argues that this model was a consequence of the psychologization of emotion that made emotions into "object lessons" (p. 29). Emotions thus became objectified into measurable, categorizable entities (Salmela & Mayer, 2009). This contributes to emotions being framed in the language of property and possession. Emotions were therefore understood as "owned," "mine," or "yours." Sara Ahmed (2004b) has aptly named this the "inside-out" model of emotions.

The inside-out model of emotions has meant that to understand emotions, one has had to look inward as this is where emotions are housed (Ahmed, 2004b). Accordingly, the examination of disgust has been guided by questions like: what does disgust feel like to me? What kinds of things elicit disgust in me? What does my body do when I feel

disgusted? How does my disgust express itself as it moves from inside me to the outside (e.g., facial expressions, sounds, etc.)? Consequently, disgust has not been understood as a form of "world-making," but rather as a subject responding to an already present, already made world. It is a form of inner response to an external world, rather than a constitutive element of that world. In other words, an inside-out model of emotion posits disgust as merely a subject-object encounter.

The answer, however, is not to reverse the "inside out" model and rely on an "outside in" model where emotions are assumed to come from without and move inwards. Such a reversal continues to assume that emotions are something we just "have" (Ahmed, 2004b). Rather, Ahmed proposes a model where emotions are critical to the very constitution of the psychic and the social as objects. In other words, emotions produce the boundaries that allow the "inside" and the "outside," or the "individual" and the "social," to be distinguished in the first place (Ahmed, 2004b, 2004a). She calls this a model of the "sociality" of emotions, or understanding emotions as "world-making" (ibid.). Consequently, Ahmed (2004a) argues that attempting to locate emotion in one site or another is misguided as it is evident that emotion "involves an interweaving of the personal with the social" (p. 28). Ahmed (2004b) highlights that this perspective is growing, especially in sociological and anthropological accounts of emotion. These accounts argue that emotions should not be understood as purely psychological states, but rather as social and cultural practices (Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990; White, G.M., 1993). However, these approaches have been limited in disgust accounts, especially in the psychological research. Current examples, however, are Nussbaum's (2004, 2010) analysis of disgust as it relates to legal structures, and Sartre's (1964) account of the ways

in which disgust relates to the experience of existence. Similarly, Ahmed's (2004b) examination of disgust puts its sociality at the forefront.

The problematic impact of the subject-object framing of disgust becomes especially evident when we consider the theory of selfhood to which it corresponds. The subject-object approach maintains the legacy of intrapsychic models of the self that emphasize the "internal" world of an individual. This is significant, not only for the way disgust is conceived, but for the way processes of selfhood are understood. Intrapsychic models of the self maintain that selfhood develops from the activity of the individual subject (Benjamin, 1988). The subject's sense of self is consequently developed through the subject encountering objects and using these objects to establish the self as autonomous and independent (ibid.). This inward looking focus results in difficulty accounting for how human experience interacts with its surroundings, including other people (Cushman, 2011; Frie & Coburn, 2011b).

Perhaps most significantly, intrasubjective theories separate the self from relationship with others. They maintain that "the individual exists in some way separate from and prior to relationship with others" (Frie & Coburn, 2011a, p. xv). As a result, intrasubjective theories of the self have been unable to account for the ways in which the self's relationship to the outside world and to others is meaningful for the emergence and sustenance of selfhood. As Benjamin (1988) argues, the intrasubjective perspective "conceives of the person as a discrete unit" (p. 20) and therefore maintains a "radical separation of subject and object, self and other" (p. 192). This separation between subject and object creates a "realm of lifeless objects" that accordingly do not play a role in processes of selfhood (ibid., p. 192). It has also meant that intrapsychic theories of the

self have not considered emotion to be relevant to these processes; if emotion is housed within the individual and understood to arise when an already formed subject meets an already formed object, then emotion is a by-product of those encounters. Furthermore, an intrapsychic approach to emotion has meant that accounts of disgust have been one-sided as they only consider the perspective of the subject encountering a disgusting object. This becomes particularly problematic when the "object" of disgust is actually another subject.

I would like to provide an analogy to demonstrate the problem that arises in a subject-object framework. Though it may seem like an extreme analogy, it highlights how grossly inadequate this approach is in theorizing emotion, and disgust specifically. Imagine if we read the description of a murder, but it is written only from the murderer's perspective. This description, however, does not include any details about the actual act of killing, but is focused solely on the murderer's experience and feelings. In this description, we would be missing something crucial: the experience of the other. Just like in current accounts of disgust, this murderer's account would detail the experience of a feeling, descriptors of how it feels in the body, but this account exists in a vacuum as it is devoid of important details that allow the reader to make sense of these experiences by contextualizing them in relation to others and the environment. In this analogy, it is evident that the murderer's account is incomplete, or even false, in that it is disconnected from critical elements of the encounter. There is nothing to tell us of the situation, let alone of the other person involved in this situation. Similarly, accounts of disgust that are divorced from the external world, or from others that share in the experience, are incomplete. In the case of a murder, it seems evident and unquestionable that a failure to account for the experience of the other would not only be grossly incomplete, but unable

to speak to the "truth" of the incident and its impacts. Yet, accounts of emotion framed in subject-object language continue to claim that the private, inner experience of an emotion that arises in an individual subject represents and captures the nature of the emotion.[18]

From the perspective of the inside-out model of emotion, the relational nature of disgust and its relevance to processes of selfhood and to world-making is neglected. However, one approach to subjectivity, Julia Kristeva's (1982) concept of the abject, offers the possibility of accounting for disgust's role in selfhood and world-making. I turn to consider some of Kristeva's main arguments about the abject and processes of abjection and their applicability to my arguments and approach to disgust.

Kristeva's concept of the abject: An inadequate way to understand disgust and selfhood

Kristeva's (1982) foundational text, *Powers of Horror* (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*) had significant influence on a range of disciplines such as cultural studies, film, and critical race studies. As Menninghaus (2003) notes, the "abject" became a new "buzzword" in the 1980s in both political and critical discourse, especially in the United States (p. 365). Although it is not explicitly a theory of disgust, Kristeva's notion of the abject and of processes of abjection links together objects of disgust and a theory of subjectivity. At first glance, therefore, it may seem that Kristeva's theory of the abject aligns with my arguments and should accordingly guide my analysis. Given this ostensible correspondence, it is worth looking at Kristeva's theory more in-depth to distinguish it

[18] My thanks to Dr. Joshua Nichols for helping me think through this example.

from my own approach and explain why Kristeva does not inform my approach to disgust.

Kristeva (1982) argues that the abject represents all that must be disowned in order to secure stable selfhood. In other words, the abject "is that which opposes the I" (ibid., p. 3). Though the abject cannot be definitively classified for Kristeva—it is "above all, ambiguity" (p. 9)—it captures anything that threatens the borders of stable and delineated selfhood. Kristeva identifies three broad forms of the abject: food, bodily functions, and socio-cultural rituals and products. Notably, Kristeva's account of the abject includes many of the objects that psychological research has identified as "primary" objects of disgust; Kristeva writes about blood, pus, decay, vomit, excrement, and even the skin that forms on milk that has been left out. As Menninghaus (2003) highlights, Kristeva's descriptions of the abject and abjection imply an "affinity with disgust" (p. 373). The abject however, is persistent and once disowned, it remains suspended and "does not cease challenging its master" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). Consequently, abjection becomes the method to establish the boundaries of the "self's clean and proper body" so that one can separate themselves as a "speaking subject" (ibid., p. 71, 94). Disgust reactions figure into Kristeva's theory as the *expression* of abjection, or the feeling of abjection. In other words, the visceral experiences of vomiting, heaving, and turning away are explained by Kristeva as the mechanism through which subjects establish themselves. Disgust reactions are "the spasms and vomitings that protect me" (ibid., p. 2).

Kristeva's theory of the abject is one framework that exposes how disgust objects can be experienced as a threat to selfhood and consequently, how the rejection of disgust

objects can result in violent actions (i.e. the abject is persistent and must be rejected for selfhood to be established). As a result, Kristeva's theory of the abject, though not a theory of disgust per se, approaches one of my arguments in this dissertation: disgust matters for processes of selfhood and for world-making. Though a critique of Kristeva is beyond the scope of this dissertation,[19] it is worth noting why Kristeva's account is inadequate for my understanding of disgust, especially given some of the ostensible similarities between disgust and the concept of the abject. My reasons for not using Kristeva's work centre on her conflation of the maternal with the abject, the inability of Kristeva's theory to perceive of more than one active subject in a disgust encounter, and the lack of accounting for fascination. These culminate in Kristeva's theory of the abject being poor in addressing the ethical question of disgust.

Firstly, Kristeva can be read as conflating the maternal with the abject. She writes, "Mother and death—both abominated, both abjected—slyly construct a victimizing and persecution machine" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 112). Abjection of mother and the maternal body is therefore the repudiation that "la[ys] the foundation of its own being" (ibid., p. 5). Consequently, Kristeva's alignment of the maternal body with the abject continues the problematic tradition of equating emotion with the "feminine," the body, and irrationality. As I show in chapter two, these associations have been problematic and limiting for the understanding of emotion generally and disgust more specifically; therefore, a framework that upholds these associations is incompatible with the account of disgust I wish to advance here.

[19] For critiques of Kristeva's theory of the abject, see Butler (1993); Creed (1993).

Secondly, Kristeva's theory only offers the possibility of a one-sided account of disgust experiences. Though Kristeva demonstrates that abjection, experienced as disgust, is necessary to secure selfhood, she considers it from an individualistic and intrapsychic view. This is perhaps not surprising given that Kristeva builds on, and responds to Freud and Lacan, whose works were more intrasubjective than intersubjective in orientation. As a result, Kristeva's theory of the abject and abjection does not adequately address the experience of two or more subjects meeting in an encounter marked by abject objects or processes of abjection, nor what it might mean to be named "the abject," or to experience being abjected by an other. As a result, Kristeva's model does not support the intersubjective approach to disgust that I am developing in my research.

Thirdly, the notion of the abject also does not adequately account for the element of fascination in disgust. This is, in part, because of the "phobia" that characterizes the experience of the abject. Though Kristeva acknowledges that eroticization of bodily wastes and other abject objects happens, she situates this desire or want as yet another form of abjection of the maternal body. In other words, fascination is still dominated by repudiation and marked by a phobia of the maternal body. As Menninghaus (2003) interprets, "All present and objective experiences of disgust, for Kristeva, can only have a phobic effect, because they recall that abject (because originally repressed) maternal body" (p. 374). This phobic effect means that there is limited space to attend to the pull of fascination because it is something to be feared or repudiated. Consequently, there is little room in Kristeva's theory to make sense of the impact of fascination in disgust outside of the shadow cast by abjection.

Fourthly, the consequences of Kristeva's "phobia" of disgust is also notable in how useful Kristeva's theory is for addressing the ethical question of disgust. This embedded phobia results in a kind of repulsion of repulsion, and thereby leads to a limited account of the ethical stakes of disgust. As I discuss later in this chapter, a theory of disgust that attempts to clear away or move past the visceral experience of disgust cannot provide answers that address the complexities of disgust experiences. As Solomon (1995) highlights, justice and morality begin not only with the "saccharine" sentiments of compassion and caring, but also the "negative" emotions like envy, anger, jealousy, and disgust (p. 242). Addressing the ethical question of disgust must also be founded in the embodied experience of disgust, not from a removed, external position that claims an imaginary objective position that has "overcome" feelings of disgust. Kristeva's concept of the abject is thereby unsatisfactory for examining the ethical question of disgust as it emphasizes rejecting the abject and disgusting.

Though Kristeva's concept of the abject brings together objects of disgust with a theory of how selfhood emerges, it is insufficient for addressing the issues in disgust that are the focus of my research. It does not provide a robust account of fascination alongside repulsion, nor is it sufficiently intersubjective in its understanding of selfhood to account for the relational aspects of disgust and selfhood. Lastly, it is unable to answer the moral and ethical demands of disgust.

The minimization of fascination in disgust accounts

The second major deficit of current approaches in psychology and the humanities to disgust is that they are unable to account very well for the element of fascination, particularly how it relates to, and operates in tandem with the element of repulsion. Indeed, the push and pull between fascination and repulsion in disgust can be difficult to understand. It seems paradoxical that two seemingly opposite elements can be present simultaneously in an experience. The element of fascination in many ways presents a threat to the "natural" element of repulsion that can feel so overpowering in disgust experiences. The visceral elements of disgust associated with repulsion (the churn of the stomach, the protruding of the tongue, vomiting) can feel more demanding or explicit than the "feeling" of fascination. The embodiment of fascination can take more subtle forms, such as the eyes shifting for a second look, or the body turning towards the disgusting object. Though in Plato's (2000) account of Leontius' disgust experience, fascination takes the form of rushing over to the corpses and holding his eyes open so they can look again. Leontius' overt form of fascination is arguably less common. The subtlety of fascination does not mean that fascination is less present or relevant to disgust experiences; however, it can explain why the element of repulsion has been more visible in disgust accounts. Given the overwhelming visceral effects of repulsion in disgust, it is challenging *not* to afford the element of repulsion more validity—it seemingly demands it.

Accordingly, the element of fascination is often dismissed, minimized, or kept silent about in analysis. As the discussion showed earlier, fascination has been described in antagonistic language that characterizes it as perverse (Herz, 2012b), a curse (Plato,

2000), or the way to insanity (McGinn, 2011). Fascination has also been characterized as animalistic and thereby not appropriate for being-human. For example, Herz (2012b) argues that "pleasure in disgust may hold up a mirror to the private, uncivilized, animalistic part of our adult souls" (p. 53) and therefore "we must fight to control our inner animal passions" (p. 57). Yet, even this may be futile as Herz writes that "Though we learn to turn off our outward zeal for these fascinations," especially as we become adults, we nevertheless "remain lured by disgust throughout our lives" (p. 52). Such characterizations foreclose the possibility of productive engagement with fascination as engagement is considered threatening, or even potentially signalling mental health concerns.

Even when fascination is not outright dismissed, it is often categorized as an oddity, or a quirk (Herz 2012b), that results in a paradox. As W. I. Miller (1997) highlights, disgust's connection to desire only receives attention via Freudian interpretations of unconscious desire, repression, and sex, while other forms of desiring the disgusting "get[] virtually no attention except in diet books" (p. 109).[20] Some accounts (McGinn, 2011) have resolved disgust's paradox by naming *all* of human nature as paradoxical and contradictory, thereby making disgust's duality a reflection of this state of nature. Similarly, Herz (2012b) suggests that fascination in disgust is due to human nature: "Yet, paradoxical and quirky creatures that we are, […] we are instead perversely attracted to and lured by […] that which disgusts us most" (p. 131). However,

[20] See Menninghaus' (2003) discussion of disgust and Freud in chapter 3, "The Psychoanalysis of Stinking: Libido, Disgust, and Cultural Development in Freud."

as Donna Orange (2009) writes, to be content theoretically with "irreducible paradox" is to "give up on the job of thinking" (p. 129).

It is my view that the inability to come to a coherent understanding of fascination and repulsion is, in part, due to the inside-out model of emotions that is unable to account for disgust as a relational experience. I will argue that to move towards a more comprehensive understanding of disgust, these two factors must be examined in tandem: the element of fascination and the relational aspects of disgust. By understanding disgust's relational elements, in particular how it is implicated in processes of selfhood, we begin to develop a framework in which repulsion and fascination can make sense.

Incomplete questions and answers: Current approaches to the ethical demands of disgust

The inability to account for fascination, combined with the lack of a relational approach to disgust has meant that the consideration of disgust's ethical implications has been limited. Understanding disgust as a relational affect implicated in "world-making" exposes the full extent of disgust's ethical ramifications as disgust would not only be operating at a personal and intrapsychic level, but *between* active subjects at an intersubjective level. Consequently, the *intra*subjective ethical question of "how ought I respond to this disgusting object?" becomes "how ought I to treat another?" in an intersubjective framework. This becomes more complicated in a consideration of disgust: "how ought I to treat another when *they* disgust me?" As my discussion will show, answers to these questions have been underdeveloped and led to simplistic suggestions

focused on overcoming disgust. Furthermore, if disgust is understood to be active in the formation of both a sense of self and of *world*, then the ethical question of disgust is not just about singular personal moments (i.e., how ought I to treat this one other person in this one disgusting encounter?), but about collective and social responsibilities: in short, world-making.

The debates on disgust's relationship to moral and ethical issues have pivoted, and been split, on whether disgust is a reliable moral guide or not. As Kelly (2011) highlights, the question is not whether disgust figures into moral judgements; the question is whether feelings of disgust should be granted authority in guiding moral and legal imperatives. Depending on what side of the debate one falls on, the answer has been to either heed the call of disgust, or work towards overcoming disgust. Those that advocate for disgust as a useful moral guide (Devlin, 1959; Kahan, 1998, 1998, 1999; Kass, 1998) primarily focus on the repulsion aspect of disgust. In other words, the things that disgust us should be avoided as they alert us to important and accurate moral judgements. In some cases, disgust is considered such a reliable guide that it serves to protect the foundations of humanity. As Kass (1997) claims, "repugnance may be the only voice left that speaks up to defend the core of our humanity. Shallow are the souls that have forgotten how to shudder" (p. 19). Accordingly, those that advocate for disgust as a reliable moral guide maintain that legal and social structures should incorporate and reflect the avoidance of objects and practices that disgust steers us away from.

In my assessment, those advocating for disgust's reliability and "wisdom" in ethical matters have been limited in that the range of their ethical questioning has often been limited to encounters with inanimate objects of disgust or the *actions* of others,

rather than encounters where another human being has been named disgusting. Nevertheless, the answer to the ethical question is inadequate as the disgust advocate position trusts disgust reactions as a kind of wisdom (Kass, 1998) that becomes difficult to dispute or critique. This trust can be problematic given disgust's tendency for over-zealousness (W. I. Miller, 1997) in moral matters. Disgust can make encounters, situations, and actions into moral issues unnecessarily; its "wisdom" therefore warrants questioning and caution.

The opposed position, which believes disgust to be unreliable and dangerous in moral and ethical matters, is more explicit in trying to answer, "how ought I to treat another?" in the face of disgust. Disgust sceptics have generally been more explicit in considering the ethical question of disgust when the object of disgust is another human being. However, this position, advanced and exemplified by Nussbaum's (2004, 2010) work, does not provide an adequate answer to the ethical question either. Here it is useful to consider Nussbaum's answer to disgust's ethical question more in depth. Nussbaum is attempting to account for the ethical demands of a disgust encounter between two subjects, yet it remains limited because of its intrasubjective approach, as well as its over-reliance on defining disgust as only repulsion.

Overcoming Disgust: Disgust skeptics' answer to disgust's ethical demand

Nussbaum (2004) asks what kind of "vision of human beings" disgust presents and whether this is a vision that should guide social, political, and legal actions (p. 171). Nussbaum (2010) concludes that "disgust rarely has any reliable connection with genuine danger" and the dangers and contaminants disgust claims to identify "typically, have no basis in reality" (p. 16). Rather, Nussbaum (2008) argues that disgust is irrational as it is

"based on inadequate or wrong-headed thought" (p. 335). Because of this irrationality, Nussbaum (2010) argues that disgust is problematic and at odds with the establishment of a society aimed at upholding the equality of all citizens.

From this conclusion, Nussbaum argues that a politics of humanity must replace a politics of disgust. Nussbaum's (2010) argues that "It is possible to view another human being as a slimy slug or a piece of revolting trash only if one has never made a serious good-faith attempt to see the world through that person's eyes or to experience that person's feelings" (p. xvii). In other words, "Disgust imputes to the other a subhuman nature" and consequently, the remedy to disgust is to humanize (ibid.). This view partly forms the basis of her politics of humanity. Consequently, she calls for an "imaginative engagement" that would foster seeing another person as some*one* and not a some*thing*. For Nussbaum, this shift is precisely what is required to replace a politics of disgust with a politics of humanity.

Similar calls for overcoming disgust can be found in other theories struggling with disgust's ethical question. Rachel Herz, a professor at Brown University's Department of Psychiatry and Human Behaviour and author of *That's Disgusting! Unraveling the Mystery of Repulsion* (2012b), recommends a simplistic and idealistic solution: if someone disgusts you, try helping them instead. As Herz (2012a) suggests in her popular media piece in *Psychology Today*, if you were disgusted by seeing an amputee, you should try and help them in order to "control" your disgust. Consequently, "Not only will you feel virtuous you will also feel much less disgusted by the sight of someone maimed in the future" (Herz, 2012a, para. 3).

Critique of Nussbaum's Politics of Humanity

The call to see others as human beings rather than objects in disgust encounters ostensibly aligns with my argument that disgust requires a subject-subject framing, rather than a subject-object framing. Nussbaum's argument, however, maintains an intrasubjective position that prioritizes the disgust*ed* subject. This prioritization of one subject undermines Nussbaum's call for humanity and compassion. As Jeremiah Conway (2001) argues, Nussbaum's conception of compassion as expressed across much of her work is a concept of *pity*, rather than compassion. While Conway's critique predates Nussbaum's work on disgust, John Haldane (2008) echoes similar sentiments in his critique of Nussbaum's work on disgust and shame specifically. He argues that Nussbaum is "surprisingly silent" about the ways in which vulnerable people and groups are subordinated "by being made the *objects* of forms of interest, concern, or pity" (emphasis added, Haldane, 2008, p. 305). Though Haldane's comments are intended to challenge Nussbaum's conception of compassion and her call for a politics of humanity, his comments also highlight the subject-object framing at work in Nussbaum's approach to the ethical demands of disgust.

Nussbaum's subject-object framing of disgust therefore maintains that the ethical question of disgust is, "how ought *I* to respond to this disgusting object (that happens to be another subject)"? The difference is subtle, but significant. In Nussbaum's configuration, the other continues to be primarily identified as an object that is eliciting *my* disgust, an object that *I* am reacting to, rather than an encounter between two active subjects. Nussbaum's position therefore preserves an individualistic, intrapsychic model where there is only one active subject (the disgusted one) that must decide what to do

with their own (owned) disgust. In other words, disgust does not happen *between* subjects, but between a disgusted subject and another "object" who happens to be a subject who has been named as disgusting. Nussbaum is therefore unable to consider the full extent of disgust's ethical question as it is a one-sided account that limits both the extent of the ethical question that can be asked, as well as the range of ethical actions that can be imagined.

Nussbaum's politics of humanity is also problematic in that it is ambiguous and underdeveloped. She calls for imaginative engagement and curiosity as the means to achieve a deep respect for humanity. Though Nussbaum remains mostly vague on what this looks like in practice, she does make some specific suggestions. For example, she suggests that "entertainment" is an excellent vehicle for transforming a politics of disgust to a politics of humanity. Entertainment such as television and movies "makes perception possible [as] pleasure makes people willing to receive another person's shape into their minds and hearts" (Nussbaum, 2010, pp. 205–206). This suggestion seems to stem from her belief that, "Ultimately, the process involves transformation at the level of the human heart" (ibid., p. xx). Nussbaum uses Gus Van Sant's film, *Milk* (2008) and the popular television series *Will and Grace* (Burrows, 2006) (both feature homosexual men as protagonists) as examples of entertainment that advanced a politics of humanity with audiences, though exactly *how* they did this is vague.

Nussbaum (2004, 2010) consistently maintains that disgust operates in violent and harmful ways in social, legal, and ethical contexts, yet her arguments result in a vague and idealistic suggestion about change at the level of the human heart. Nussbaum's politics of humanity does not seem distinct from Judeo-Christian calls for "neighbourly

love," or the Golden Rule of "do unto others as you would have them do to you."[21] This suggestion does not seem politically viable and raises questions about the practicality, feasibility, and effectiveness of her suggestions. Similarly, Herz's (2012a) suggestions for addressing the harm disgust can cause raise the same questions. Her recommendation to help those that disgust us is inappropriate, not only in the suggestion she makes by naming people with amputated limbs "disgusting," but in its over-simplification. Just like Nussbaum, Herz (2012a, 2012b) acknowledges that disgust is a complex experience that is shaped by factors such as socialization and context, yet her solution for "controlling" disgust falls short in meeting the complex demands of disgust. Furthermore, the suggestion that disgust can be controlled by the exercise of will and work maintains the problematic history of viewing emotions as interference that accordingly need to be cleared away by "big brother" reason.

It is possible that part of this ambiguity is due to Nussbaum defining disgust primarily as repulsion; she provides no account of fascination in disgust encounters. As a result, she is unable to imagine connection or fascination to be anything other than repulsion's *opposite*. Nussbaum's politics of humanity calls for an engagement with others that could be interpreted as a form of fascination, but rather than locating that engagement, or its possibility, as *already present* in the disgust encounter, she locates it *outside* of the disgust encounter, separate from it. Consequently, it becomes even harder to imagine how to access this "engaged" viewpoint when it is posited at a distance from the encounter at hand. It is therefore unclear what this imaginative engagement might

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[21] It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine the golden rule in depth however it is worth noting that a history of critique exists. For example, see Kant (1998), and Locke (1996).

look like beyond a good will gesture of trying to think about someone else's position. It is especially unclear how imaginative engagement translates into personal, social, and ethical practices in a meaningful and, perhaps most importantly, accessible way. Lastly, Nussbaum's suggestions seem removed from the particularities of disgust as they seem applicable to any "bad feeling" we may have towards others. This contributes to an impractical ethical response as it does not respond, nor correspond directly to the lived experiences of disgust.

Furthermore, the consequence of Nussbaum's repulsion-only definition of disgust is that the ethical *response* to feeling disgusted is also partial; it only accounts for, and acts on, the feeling of repulsion. Repulsion is founded in the experience of "pushing away" when we feel disgusted and, therefore, the actions stemming from this desire can be violent, aggressive, and harmful in the attempt to create distance from others. If, however, space can be created conceptually and tangibly for the "pull towards" in disgust experiences (as fascination and its various forms), then different responses to feeling disgusted are possible. This possibility, for me, is a viable beginning for imagining and enacting our ethical responsibilities in the face of disgust, as opposed to vague appeals to imagination.

Remembering the Throws of Nausea: Developing Ethical Responses through Correspondence to Lived Experience

Both Nussbaum's and Herz's accounts are representative of the general position upheld by disgust sceptics that overcoming disgust is the answer to the ethical question of disgust. It is my contention, however, that attempting to "clear away" the experience of disgust, or replace it, is a denial of the affective nature of human experience. If our

ethical responses are divorced from the lived realities of experience—the messiness and complexity of feeling—then they can only ever be incomplete and partial. Solomon's (1995) account of justice calls for a similar engagement. He writes that, "we learn about justice and injustice not as mere spectators ("ideal" and "impartial" or otherwise) but by being engaged in the world" (ibid., p. 243). Indeed, we are, at times, disgusted by others and we are responsible to treat the other humanely *in light of* this disgust, alongside it, not *after* the feeling of disgust passes, or once we have learned to control it. Accordingly, we cannot answer the ethical question in disgust from the position of a spectator, but rather from a position that remembers the throws of nausea, the grimace of the face, the allure to look again. Furthermore, this position must be willing to take responsibility for the actions that can stem from these experiences—harmful, violent, or otherwise. As Jessica Benjamin (1998) argues, to conceive of the ethical relationship in a meaningful and livable way, there must be an acknowledgement of our capacities for destructiveness, to own "what properly belongs to the self" and to "postulate a self who can assume both 'goodness' and 'badness'" (pp. 99–100). She writes that, "This possible self, this monster, must be included in any conception of the self that intends to confront that violence to the other, the revulsion at which motivates the appeal to respect, recognition, of difference" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 86). Consequently, accounting for the complexities of disgust leads to ethical responses that are viable because they respond and correspond directly to lived experiences.

My aim in this chapter has been to survey some of the major themes in disgust research. Drawing on both the psychological research and research in the humanities, the elements of threat, morality and ethics, and fascination were key aspects of current

conceptualizations of disgust. However, as my discussion showed, current approaches have lacked a relational, intersubjective framework and this has contributed to the inability to account for disgust as relevant to processes of selfhood and to "world-making," the minimization and lack of understanding of fascination, and limited accounts of the ethical question of disgust. Before suggesting one way in which these gaps could be addressed, however, it is necessary to understand what historical, social, and cultural contexts may have given rise to the ways in which disgust is currently understood. I turn to look at some of these contexts in the next chapter to understand what has shaped and limited the field thus far, and accordingly, to propose a different approach to disgust—a feminist politics of disgust.

Chapter 2.

Toward a Feminist Politics of Disgust: Exposing and Changing our Disgust "lenses"

> *In a conversation, when we have discovered the other person's standpoint and horizon, his ideas become intelligible without our necessarily having to agree with him; so also when someone thinks historically, he come to understand the meaning of what has been handed down without necessarily agreeing with it or seeing himself in it. (Gadamer, 2003, p. 303)*

In this chapter, I explore some of the contextual factors that have influenced current accounts of disgust. As the title of this chapter suggests, these contexts have been the "lenses" through which disgust has been seen and therefore invite the following question: what theoretical, social, and cultural lenses has disgust been seen through thus far? What paradigms have shaped the way disgust is researched, conceptualized, and understood and how have these paradigms contributed to the gaps and oversights in current disgust accounts? My reason for examining these influencing contexts is that it is necessary, in my view, to understand what has led to current accounts so as to identify what a *different* account might look like. To use the metaphor of lenses and sight again, it is difficult to adjust and improve the prescription of our lenses if we do not first recognize that we were wearing lenses in the first place and that these lenses shaped and *limited* what we were seeing. An examination of the contextual factors shaping disgust accounts therefore puts

into relief that these accounts are constructed and thereby contingent on the ways of seeing and the ways of thinking that were at use. Exposing this contingency indicates that disgust can be seen anew—differently—when we account for our lenses, their shortcomings, and then adjust the prescription accordingly. The current lenses for disgust research are myopic, short-sighted, and thereby lead to an over-emphasis on the aspects of disgust that are close at hand—repulsion, the experience of the subject that feels disgusted, and disgust as a by-product of experience. In this chapter, I will examine three contexts that have been the primary lenses shaping how we see disgust experiences: mind/body dualism, the ideals of Western individualism, and lastly, patriarchal ideologies. Accounting for these contexts will not only afford understanding into why current disgust accounts look the way that they do, especially in terms of the gaps and oversights they maintain, but allows for the identification of approaches that lead to different and new perspectives on disgust.

Approaches to disgust fall under the larger history of emotions in Western thought that has been primarily dominated by the belief that emotions are a pollutant or hindrance to the pursuit of truth and knowledge (Bordo, 1987b; Code, 1991; S. Harding & Hintikka, 2003; Jaggar, 1989; Jaggar & Bordo, 1989). As Williams and Bendelow (1996) highlight, emotions have been "lurking in the shadows or banished to the margins of […] thought and practice" (p. 125) and "even to the present day, emotions are seen to be the very antithesis of the detached scientific mind and its quest for 'objectivity', 'truth' and 'wisdom'" (ibid., p. 126). Traditional psychological and educational research and theory are also embedded within this history; therefore, emotion has been historically omitted or dismissed within these fields as well (Boler, 1997, 1999; Kristjánsson, 2016; Shutz &

Pekrun, 2007; M. Zembylas, 2005). Academic critiques of the dismissal and denigration of emotion in Western thought are well-established; indeed, some of the literature is two decades old, yet these perspectives have not been applied to the study of disgust specifically. Accordingly, my aim in this chapter will be to apply these critiques to current approaches to disgust and show how they have contributed to limited and myopic understandings of disgust experiences.

My discussion will focus on three historical and social contexts that have shaped current disgust research: first, the impact of mind and body dualism, particularly in its Cartesian form, on aligning emotions with the "feminine;" second, the effect of Western individualism on understanding subjectivity and emotions; and third, the ways in which patriarchal ideologies have shaped understandings of emotion and subjectivity. These contexts have contributed to an over-emphasis on repulsion, a minimization of fascination, the lack of a relational approach to understanding disgust, and the inability to account for disgust's significance to meaning-making.

I will approach my analysis through the lens of feminist theory and critique. Feminist frameworks have provided some of the more robust evaluations of patriarchal structures, especially of the historical relationship between emotion and the "feminine." Furthermore, feminist frameworks expose and challenge traditional conceptualizations of emotion by examining the ways in which these conceptualizations are politically motivated (Benhabib & Cornell, 1987; Boler, 1999, 2015; Code, 1991; E. Grosz, 1993; E. A. Grosz, 1994; S. Harding & Hintikka, 2003; M. Zembylas, 2005). The strength of feminist critiques comes from their work to challenge dichotomous structures, reject conceptualizations of subjectivity based on masculine ideals, and reclaim emotion as

central to epistemology, ontology, and subjectivity. Alison Jaggar (1989) articulates what an approach informed by feminist critiques might look like:

> The alternative epistemological models that I would suggest display the continuous interaction between how we understand the world and who we are as people. They would show how our emotional responses to the world change as we conceptualize it differently and how our changing emotional responses then stimulate us to new insights…Thus, the models would explain how the reconstruction of knowledge is inseparable from the reconstruction of ourselves. (p. 164).

The approach Jaggar suggests is key in exposing the limits of the paradigms or lenses through which disgust has been primarily theorized and conceptualized thus far. It is particularly useful as it accounts for the intersection of emotions with epistemology, ontology, and subjectivity.

I begin my analysis with an overview of Descartes' theory of mind/body dualism and its development. My interpretations of his writings, especially in *Meditations* (1996), incorporate feminist perspectives on Descartes, especially the work of Susan Bordo (1987b), Allison Jaggar (1989), Genevieve Lloyd (1984, 2002a), and Lorraine Code (1991). After this overview, I "locate" Descartes in current disgust theories to show how Cartesian dualism has shaped the ways disgust is understood. I will argue that disgust accounts continue to bear Descartes' problematic legacy of denigrating emotions.

From my discussion and application of Descartes, I move to a consideration of the ideals of Western individualism and how these ideals have shaped both theories of

subjectivity and of emotion. As in my discussion of Descartes, my discussion turns from this overview to "locating" individualism in current conceptualizations of disgust. I will argue that intellectual commitments to the ideals of Western individualism have limited and continue to limit understanding disgust, especially its relationship to processes of meaning-making.

I do not take up the impact of patriarchal power structures as a separate context to analyze as I do with Cartesian dualism and Western individualism; the ideology of patriarchal power cannot be separated from Cartesian dualism and Western individualism as they are founded in patriarchal social structures. My analysis therefore weaves in a critique of the ways in which the context of patriarchal power has shaped and determined discourses about emotion and disgust.

After examining and critiquing how each of these contexts has impacted disgust accounts, I argue that a feminist politics of disgust offers a new "prescription" for seeing disgust. In other words, a feminist politics of disgust maintains different epistemic and ontological commitments that actively work against the denigration and dismissal of emotion and thereby afford the possibility to theorize, conceptualize, and understand disgust anew.

Descartes' Destructive Legacy: Conflating the Feminine, the Body, and Irrationality

Rene Descartes' (1970, 1996, 2000) work provides the primary coordinate or reference for the modern philosophical questioning of mind and body (Bordo, 1987b). Though the

struggle to articulate the relationship between the body and the mind did not begin with Descartes—the perspective that human life is bifurcated into the bodily and the mental can be traced back among various philosophers and thinkers[22]—the problem of mind/body dualism finds its solidification in Descartes. Consequently, Descartes' dualism has had a resilient hold in Western philosophic and epistemic traditions as it set up a "pivotal philosophical assumption that mind and its (ordered) activities are superior to body and its (disorderly) experiences" (Code, 1991, p. 242). As Anthony Kenny (1985) highlights, one is "awed at the breathtaking power of an intellect which could propagate, almost unaided, a myth which to this day has such a comprehensive grasp on the imagination of a large part of the human race" (p. 77). As a result, the assumption of the mind's superiority to the body has meant that Western philosophic traditions since Descartes have actively worked to disassociate mind and body.

My interest is in how Cartesian dualism shaped the alignment of emotion with the feminine by separating mind and body so distinctly. As Genevieve Lloyd (1984, 2002a) highlights, Cartesian philosophy was not necessarily "suspect" for feminists in the method it proposed for training the will to control the passions, nor for Descartes' suggestions on how certainty and truth could be obtained; rather, Cartesian philosophy was problematic in its "rigid separation" of mind and body as distinct and opposed (p. 9). The mind/body separation contributed to a series of dichotomous conceptual alignments[23]

[22] For example, see the writings of St. Augustine (1961), and Plato (1953). Though, as Bordo (1987 highlights, the body and sense had been a reliable epistemological "guide" during the Middle Ages, except for the body's sexual desires that served to obstruct spiritual purity.

[23] The significance of conceptual alignments should not be minimized. It is easy to dismiss these alignments as merely theoretical and abstract, or as relevant only in academic and intellectual settings without bearing on the lived experiences of individuals, a community, or society. However, there is a rich history of work demonstrating that institutional practices, discourses, and technologies play a constitutive

in Western thought and philosophy that feminist theorists have shown to be structured around the male/female binary.

Descartes' dualism builds on a history of associating maleness with superiority. As Lloyd (1984) notably demonstrated in *The Man of Reason,* the contrasting of "male" and "female" can be traced back the sixth century BCE when the Pythagoreans articulated the table of opposites. This was based on the Pythagorean understanding of the world as being made up of form and formlessness (ibid.). Form—as clear, orderly, and bounded—was the good, while formlessness—indeterminate, disorderly, and unbounded—was the bad or inferior (ibid.). The form and formlessness split was the basis for ten other contrasting relationships for the Pythagoreans, such as right/left, light/dark, good/bad, and male/female. As Lloyd (1984) highlights, "male" and "female" were therefore not mere terms of description but classified a relationship between a superior term and its inferior opposite. The association of maleness with superiority

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role in particular ways of being a subject in the world (for example, see the work of Althusser, 1971; Foucault, 2012; Hacking, 1999). Martin, Sugarman and Hickinbottom (2010) argue in a similar vein that, "Much of our personhood consists in taking up and acting in terms of the descriptions made available to us" (p. 168). As academics, researchers, people—we must take seriously the forms of visibility that are given to emotions as they are a part of the "terms of description" that are available for self-experience and for affective experiences. Not only do these institutions generate terms of description for experience, but they are sites of constant negotiation and encounter with "new practices of personhood," through which "we experience new possibilities and ways of being persons" (Martin et al., 2010, p. 66). What may at first seem like small conceptual shifts are precisely what make it possible to imagine, mobilize, and practice different ways of being a subject in the world. Such seemingly minor shifts represent changes in the terms of description that are available for persons to take up, act on, and use to make meaning of their experiences of self, the world, and of others.

persisted throughout Western philosophical thought[24] and was at the basis of the mind/body contrast solidified by Descartes.[25]

The mind and body split is therefore characteristic of *patriarchal* Western philosophical traditions that uphold a male/female distinction to maintain patriarchal power structures. In other words, dichotomies such as mind/body, public/private, culture/nature, reason/emotion are mobilized in order to reinforce the hierarchical male/female binary. Reinforcing these dichotomies meant suppressing the "female side" of these dichotomies and reinforcing the "male side." For example, Fredrich Nietzsche (1911) wrote, "Woman is more closely related to Nature than man…Culture is with her always something external, a something which does not touch the kernel that is eternally faithful to Nature" (p. 23). Three dichotomies are particularly relevant to my work: mind/body, reason/emotion, and male/female. Descartes' separation of mind and body served to separate reason and emotion as mutually exclusive. These associations are gendered as they are structured around the male/female binary and serve to uphold the primacy of male over female in patriarchal western societies.

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24 See Lloyd's (1984) complete text for an account of how "maleness" and "femaleness" have been constructed through the history of Western philosophy. See also Code (1991) for a discussion of the impact that the male/female dichotomy had on western epistemology.

25 I am aware that all the blame for problematic conceptualizations of mind and body cannot be placed on Descartes. In Lloyd's (2002a) edited collection, Feminism and History of Philosophy, there is a clear tension across chapters between what Lloyd calls the "first" Descartes and the "second" Descartes. The first Descartes is the one found in the early Meditations, in which the emphasis is on the profound separation of mind and body. The second Descartes is found in the sixth Meditation and in The Passions of the Soul, in which the emphasis is on the union of the mind and body. Lloyd (2002b) argues that the second Descartes is important for feminism in that Descartes concludes that mind and body "intermingle" and therefore presents different possibilities for the role of reason, emotion, and body. My focus is on the "first" Descartes as it has shaped and dominated Western thought and is the Descartes most identifiable in traditional theories of emotion and disgust more specifically.

The Cartesian understanding of the body

Descartes' struggle with mind and body cannot be understood outside of his larger epistemic project and the historical context within which it arose.[26] In this section I consider how Cartesian dualism arose within Descartes' search for truth and certainty. I then outline the significance of Cartesian dualism on understanding emotions.

Overcoming the body: Descartes' search for truth and certainty

Descartes lived and wrote during the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth-century. The scientific revolution resulted from what Bordo (1987b) calls the "epistemic insecurity" of the Renaissance; models of truth, proof, and certainty previously based on eurocentrism and religious writings had come into question because of scientific discoveries such as the telescope, the work of Galileo and Copernicus, and the impacts of the Reformation (ibid.). The nature of the universe and the role of human beings within it had consequently come radically into question, as did the criterions and methods used to investigate and answer these questions. The epistemic insecurity of this time was so pervasive in Descartes' work that it has come to be called "Cartesian anxiety": the desire or attempt to secure absolute certainty through scientific methods and through the view that the world is separate from ourselves.

[26] Historical accounts are characteristic of feminist scholarship. Susan Bordo's analysis of Descartes is precisely a historical reading of Descartes' writings; she argues that Descartes' dilemmas and solutions "make their fullest sense in the context of the cultural pressures that gave rise to them" (p. 3). Bordo's reading of Descartes has heavily influenced my own interpretations of Descartes and I draw on her perspectives to understand the contexts framing scholarship on emotion.

In response to this anxiety, Descartes endeavoured for a secure model of knowledge based on clarity, certainty, and detachment between self and world (Bordo, 1987b). Descartes (1996) is clear in this endeavour as he sets out in the *Meditations* to "subtract anything capable of being weakened, even minimally, by the arguments now introduced, so that what is left at the end may be exactly and only what is certain and unshakeable" (Meditation II, p. 17). Consequently, throughout the *Meditations*, Descartes struggles with doubt, the existence of God, and the distinctness of mind and body to conclude that ontological certainty comes from the *cogito*. *Cogito ergo sum*—I think, therefore I am. For Descartes, the *cogito* provided ontological certainty in that it could not be doubted, even if "a deceiver of supreme power" existed (ibid.). If such a deceiver did exist, Descartes (1996) asserts that "he will never bring it about that I am nothing *so long as I think that I am something*" (emphasis added, Meditation II, p. 17). In other words, ontological certainty is established through the act of conceiving and thinking it.

Descartes' (1996) "discovery" of the *cogito* and his subsequent conclusion that he exists as an "I," however, did not give him "sufficient understanding of what this 'I' is" (Meditation II, p. 17). In Descartes' ensuing investigation of what he *is*, he extensively considered what he is *not*. The clearest thing he was *not*, was body: "I am not that structure of limbs which is called a human body" (ibid., p. 18). Descartes' assertion that he is not body is based again on the search for epistemic certainty; the body cannot provide certainty as "everything relating to the nature of body, could be mere dreams (or chimeras)" (ibid., p. 19). The body is therefore not to be trusted in the search for ontological and epistemic certainty and truth.

It is important to note at this point that even though Descartes was motivated by the search for certainty in understanding, he identified limits to human comprehension. Descartes (1970) stated that even though it "is impossible to prove or even to conceive that there are bounds to the *matter* of which the world is made," limits existed "which are known to God though inconceivable to me" (emphasis added, p. 221). Consequently, *to know* something within the limits of human capacities did *not* require complete understanding of it, but rather the ability to "touch" or "embrace" it through the act of thinking. Descartes'(1970) mountain analogy captures this distinction well:

> In the same way we can touch a mountain with our hands but we cannot put our arms around it as we could put them around a tree or something else not too large for them. To comprehend something is to embrace it in one's thought; to know something it is sufficient to touch it with one's thought. (p. 15)

This distinction is important as it emphasizes that Descartes was motivated by "the possibility of *pure* thought, of *pure* perception," rather than complete and absolute comprehension of the infinite universe (original emphasis, Bordo 1987b, p. 76). For this purity to be revealed, the knower must also be "purified" of all the "distortions" of subjectivity—biases, emotional attachments, and passions—that stand in the way of thinking (ibid.). Distinguishing "the pure" requires identifying the "contaminated" or "impure" that brings the pure into relief. For Descartes, the impure realm was the body.

Even occasional doubt for Descartes was unacceptable and a sign of falsehood. It is interesting to note the *felt* experience of doubt and uncertainty for Descartes that may have motivated his philosophy. He recounts how his doubts are so serious and overwhelming that he feels as if he has "fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which

tumbles around so that [he] can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top" (Descartes, 1996, Meditation I, p. 17). This statement offers a glimpse of the embodied experience of Descartes' process and consequently, widens our understanding of the possible motivations underlying his arguments. One imagines that tumbling in a whirlpool without sense of orientation or direction, and without the possibility of escaping the whirlpool results in a feeling of anxiety and a sense of urgency to get out. It is perhaps no surprise then that Descartes' writing presses forward with a similar urgency to resolve the ontological and epistemic questions he struggles with. As Bordo (1987b) writes, "Where there is anxiety, there will almost certainly be found a mechanism of defense against that anxiety" (p. 75). Indeed, in the second Meditation, having occasional or slight doubt becomes sufficient for identifying complete falsehood: "Anything which admits of the slightest doubt I will set aside just as if I had found it to be wholly false" (p. 16). Thus begins Descartes' dismissal of the body and the senses as unreliable and false sources of true knowledge. Descartes deemed the body and its accompanying senses to be unreliable because they had *sometimes* caused deception and led to falsehoods. In the opening pages of the first Meditation, Descartes (1996) writes that,

> Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired from the senses or through the senses. But from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.[27] (Meditation I, p. 12)

[27] For an analysis of Descartes' conclusion that occasional deception should lead to a distrust in all the senses at all times, see chapter two in Bordo (1987a), and Kenny (1968).

Consequently, the unreliable and "deceitful" body became "a hindrance to the mind in its thinking" (Descartes, 1970, p. 111). It literally and figuratively "weighed" the soul down and acted as a source of obscurity, disruption, and interference to the pursuit of truth and knowledge (Bordo, 2003). As such, the body came to be an epistemological limitation requiring transcendence. Accordingly, Descartes worked out a method to control the influence of the body and through this mastery, achieve objectivity and pure thought. He practices this method in his own writing, as he trains himself to be non-reliant on his senses:

> I will now shut my eyes, stop my ears, and withdraw all my senses. I will eliminate from my thoughts all images of bodily things, or rather, since this is hardly possible, I will regard all such images as vacuous, false, and worthless. (Descartes, 1996, Meditations III, p. 24)

The terms assigned to the senses and "bodily things" in this passage are striking: vacuous, false, and worthless. This condemnation established the dualism at the heart of Descartes' philosophy: the mind versus the body.

As with many of the concepts Descartes grappled with, the separation of the mind and body had been a central question in philosophical inquiry preceding him. Similarly, the conclusion that mind ruled over body was also not new in Descartes; however, Descartes' definition of mind and body as *mutually exclusive* was significant. The body for Descartes was *res extensa*, meaning a substance that is external, corporeal, and material. Indeed, Descartes (2000) conceptualizes the body as machine-like and compares its functions (one cannot speak of its "life") to that of a watch:

> …the body of a living man differs from that of a dead man just as does a watch or other automaton…when it is wound up…from the same watch or other machine when it is broken and when the principle of its movement ceases to act. (p. 299)

Res cogitans, on the other hand, was non-physical, and mental; in other words, consciousness and thought. Perhaps most significantly, these definitions of *res cogitans* were related to godliness; they encompassed the qualities that human beings shared with Descartes' conception of God (Bordo, 1987b). *Res cogitans* was "all that which is God-like or spiritual" (ibid., p. 102). In contrast, *res extensa* had nothing to do with God, godliness, or "the good." It was "*defined* by its lack of affiliation with divinity, with spirit" (original emphasis, Bordo, 1987b, p. 102). Therefore, the purity of the intellect, of truth, and knowledge was secured through transcending all that is *res extensa.*

By conceiving of mind and body as distinct substances that were defined through their opposition to one another, Descartes constructed a view of the intellect as independent from the body. The body was *unnecessary* for existence; Descartes (1996) claims, "…it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it" (p. 54). Not only was the body unnecessary, but it was the lesser of the two. This is in part because of the dichotomous structure Descartes mapped onto mind and body. Dichotomous thinking posits two terms that are not complementary or interdependent in any way (Code, 1991). In such a structure, everything is defined by being either A or Not-A and these two terms "exhaust all possibilities" (Code, 1991, p. 29). As Jay (1981) highlights, dichotomous structures are "wonderfully simple and supremely all-encompassing" (p. 48). However, they are dangerous in that they are distorting of reality by suggesting that one side of the dichotomy exists negatively (Not-A) (ibid.). For

Descartes, everything was either *res cogitans* (as the good), or not-*res cogitans*. This meant that *res extensa* was understood as the negative and consequently, everything identified as *res extensa*—the body, emotions, senses, and passions—was condemned to the negative.

This condemnation of the body as negative and unnecessary epistemically and ontologically has persisted throughout the history of Western philosophy and is particularly evident in conceptions of emotion.

Descartes' "bodily things": Irreconcilable emotion

Emotions constituted one of the "bodily things" that Descartes considered worthless. Emotions, passions, and appetites were felt "in, and on account of, th[e] body" (Descartes, 1996, p. 52). In other words, emotions found their "birthplace" in the body and therefore were incompatible and burdensome to the "pure" knowledge that Descartes valorized and pursued (Bordo, 1987b; Code, 1991; Jaggar, 1989). Descartes' mistrust of the emotions became one of the hallmarks of western intellectual traditions to the point that emotions could be considered "subversive" of knowledge in western traditions (Jaggar, 1989, p. 145). As a result, bodily responses, sensations, and emotions were indicative of nothing more than how one felt about objects in the world; they were not telling of the "objective" qualities of an object, or what an object truly "is" as an object (Bordo, 1987b). Emotions were irreconcilable to the epistemic project as it was conceived by Descartes and therefore needed to be controlled. Descartes' method for control was to prescribe the exercise of reason.

Controlling the emotions through the prescription of reason

Control over the passions was not a novel concern in philosophical inquiry preceding Descartes;[28] however, Descartes proposed a new direction in how to control the senses and passions. For Descartes, this mastery could be achieved through the exercise and application of reason (Descartes 1969; Code 1991; Taylor 1989). Reason provided the means through which the world and the body could be approached "mechanistically and functionally, in the same way that an uninvolved external observer would" so that certainty and truth could be achieved (Taylor, 1989, p. 145). As Taylor (1989) writes, the "hegemony of reason comes to be understood as rational control, the power to objectify body, world, and passion" (p. 151) and through this objectification, the power to comprehend the "order of reality" (Jaggar, 1989, p. 145). In this sense, reason was very much a "prescription" to overcome the ills caused by the body and senses. Through the application of reason, one could become a detached external observer of the world in order to separate *res cogitans* from *res extensa*; distinguishing between the two was crucial for the attainment of truth and knowledge.[29] For Descartes, the method of reason

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[28] The question of "the passions," especially their control and management, can be found as far back as Aristotle, as well as being pervasive in early-modern Europe. Importantly, as Jaggar (1989) points out, there are instances in western epistemology where emotion has not been completely excluded and separated from reason, such as in Greek conceptions of mind, body, reason, and emotion. Consequently, the question of what to do with the passions in western epistemology has varied from suppression, to management, to "needing direction" (ibid., p. 145). See Marcia Homiak's (2002) essay, "Feminism and Aristotle's Rational Ideal" and Susan James' (2002) essay, "The Passions and Philosophy" as they provide an excellent feminist approach to the history of Western philosophy and the question of the passions specifically.

[29] For a thorough discussion of how Descartes' method of detached reason leads to clarity in the context of Descartes' larger philosophical project, see Taylor (1989), particularly chapter 8, "Descartes's disengaged reason" and Lloyd (1984), particularly chapter 3, "Reason as attainment."

was a unified and universal method that would resolve the threat of the emotions and body and "yield[] truth regardless of subject-matter" (Lloyd, 1984, p. 41).

The establishment of reason as the method to attain truth and knowledge depended on Descartes' mind/body dichotomy. Reason was the activity of the mind and intellect. Consequently, pure intellect could remove itself from the "intrusion" of the body—of emotions, appetite, passions, senses—in order to comprehend the distinctions between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, immaterial and material, mind and matter. The consequence of this alignment was that the body was linked to another negative companion term: irrationality. The association of the body with irrationality served to further denigrate emotions. By being separate from the mind, emotions were distinct from the capacity for reason and therefore were epistemically threatening and disruptive (Little, 1995). This distinction forms the basis for the Enlightenment conception of reason and affect: reason is the means for clarity, while emotions obscure and threaten truth (Little, 1995). As Boler (2015) poignantly writes, reason became "the cherished son" with "pride of place and free rein in the master's house, awarded crowns while the lowly sisters shiver in disrepute" (p. 1491). The "ideal epistemic stance" of Western epistemology becomes defined by detachment, reason, and transcendence of the body and its accompanying functions. As we will see in the following section, it is no accident that Boler named reason "the son," while emotion takes feminine form as the "sister."

Responses to Descartes: Reconciling reason and emotion

Descartes' line of thinking about the separation of reason and emotion has persisted as the dominant ideology in Western thought and philosophy. Even as objections and critiques have mounted, however, Cartesian dualism "exhibits remarkable powers of

recuperating from severe injury: indeed, it seems able to regenerate amputated limbs" (Baker & Morris, 2002, p. 1). Nevertheless, there have been significant efforts to establish reason and emotion as compatible and positively related to one another (Prokhovnik, 1999, p. 53).[30] The recognition that emotion has cognitive elements and operates in the mind *and* body has meant that contemporary theories of emotion have begun to look different than traditional approaches. Contemporary philosophy of mind, philosophy of psychology, and psychology of emotion have all seen this shift take place. The disciplines of education and psychology have also begun to move away from traditional ideals of suppressing emotions for the rule of reason (Kristjánsson, 2016). For example, moral education has shifted to become largely a process of sensitization to emotions, and the appearance of buzzwords like "emotional intelligence" in research and in popular discourse are reflective of an increase in the visibility and positive valuing of emotional life (ibid.).[31]

Beginning in the late 1960s with the rise of second wave feminism, feminist scholars have been especially active in reconceptualizing the relationship between reason and emotion. This has included efforts to assess the rationality of emotion (De Sousa, 1987), provide alternate interpretations of Descartes (Shapiro, 2002), propose a "female

[30] I would argue however that even the language around this, focused on "compatibility" and separate "operations," upholds a dichotomous structure in thinking about rationality and emotion. I interpret this as an indication of the stronghold that dichotomous structures have in structures of thought, analysis, and discourse.

[31] Though it is beyond the scope of my examination to evaluate educational and psychological trends such as the increase in "emotional intelligence" discourse, it is worthwhile noting that there are debates as to whether these trends are in fact, contributing positively to the visibility of emotion socially. For example, see Boler's (2015) article, "Feminist Politics of Emotions and Critical Digital Pedagogies: A Call to Action."

version" of rationality (Green, 1995), situate emotion as necessary to the operation of reason (Little, 1995; Prokhovnik, 1999), and generally interrogate the foundations of Western epistemology (Bordo, 1987b; Code, 1991; Dinnerstein, 1976; Fuss, 2013; Gilligan, 1982; E. Grosz, 1993; Haraway, 1988; S. G. Harding, 1986; S. Harding & Hintikka, 2003; Hekman, 2013; Jaggar, 1989; Keller, 1985; Lloyd, 1984). Across these varied efforts to reconceptualize reason and emotion, theorists have had to struggle with how the mind/body dichotomy interacts with the male/female binary. In short, the mind/body dichotomy serves to support the domination of male over female; I turn to examine this impact next.

Cartesian dualism and its "masculinization of thought"

Cartesian dualism contributed to what Karl Stern (1967) notably called a "masculinization of thought."[32] As outlined above, the purity of the mind could only be established by designating an "impure realm" that would absorb all that seemingly stood in opposition to purity (Bordo, 1987b). This was not only the body, but also the "feminine." As a result, the mind/body dichotomy aligned with a male/female dichotomy and designated female as inferior to male, just as the body was inferior to the mind (Bordo, 2003; Dinnerstein, 1976; Halberstam, 1991). As Moira Gatens (1991) highlights, dichotomous thinking is not necessarily bad in itself, but it becomes problematic when it advances social and political values and agendas by naturalizing the division and establishing hierarchies accordingly. Gatens' argument is particularly pertinent to an

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[32] Evelyn Fox Keller's work, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, provides a robust study of gendered associations and sexual metaphors in the history of Western epistemology. See also Harding, 1981; Harding & Hintikka, 1983.

analysis of Cartesian dualism. Descartes' formulation of the mind/body dichotomy promoted the privileging of males (whether intentionally or not) and thereby is not a neutral way of categorizing the world.

As Lloyd (1984) demonstrated and as I discussed earlier in this chapter, the mapping of these dichotomous relationships onto one another began early in western philosophy with the Pythagorean metaphysical principles that separated the world into opposites. In particular, maleness was associated with light, the good, determinate form and limits, while its opposite femaleness was associated with the bad, the unlimited, and darkness (Code, 1991; Lloyd, 1984). As Lloyd (1984) established, maleness continued to be "associated with a clear, determinate mode of thought, [and] femaleness with the vague and indeterminate" through the history of Western philosophy and life (p. 3). Descartes' philosophy solidified these associations and thereby contributed to the "profound flight from the feminine" that permeated the seventeenth-century and onwards (Bordo, 1987b, p. 105).[33]

The solidification of the perceived inferiority of female to male was, in part, because of Descartes' definition of *res cogitans* and *res extensa* as a mutually exclusive dichotomy. As the discussion earlier highlighted, dichotomous structures operate on A/Not-A distinctions. As a result, anything that was "female" was identifiable by it being "not-male." This in turn, defined "female" to be negative (as "not-male"), lacking, and incompatible with "the good." Suppressing the feminine became necessary for

[33] For historical accounts of the seventeenth century's increasing fear of, and resulting flight from the feminine, see Merchant (1981) and Rich (1995) in particular.

establishing and uplifting the good—which was synonymous with concepts such as male, reason, and objectivity.

Establishing Male Hegemony through the Feminization of Emotion

The discussion thus far has demonstrated how emotion was the purview of the body, and the body the purview of the feminine in western epistemological models. This meant that emotion was also the feminine domain and thereby equally devalued. Emotion was then incompatible with the "masculine," the rational, and the good (Alcoff, 2000; Boler, 1999; Bordo, 1987b; Code, 1991, 2006; Haraway, 1991; Jaggar, 1989; Lloyd, 1984).[34]

The conception of emotion as irrelevant and threatening solidified throughout Western thought into a foundational epistemic and ontological assumption. This solidification was in part because the divisions between male and female, reason and emotion, mind and body were understood to be rooted in the "natures" of male and female (Little, 1995); or in other words, that sexual difference manifested through these distinctions and therefore the distinctions had to be rigid and opposed (ibid.). As a result, the association between emotions and the feminine, or females, was so profound that it became "nearly ubiquitous" in Western thought (ibid., p. 119).

The significance of emotions being designated as the "feminine" was immense for epistemic pursuits. Emotions were "too trivial, too particular, for epistemological notice" (Code, 1991, p. 28-29). Not only were emotions excluded from philosophic traditions, but so were women. Women were seen as "unfit for the abstract life of pure reason in

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[34] Genevieve Lloyd's (1984) pivotal work, *The Man of Reason*, provides a thorough argument that the Western ideal of reason excludes concepts of the feminine and that the feminine has been constructed through this exclusion.

which true knowers must engage" (ibid., p. 29). The ideal knower therefore was *male*, and the ideal form of knowledge was marked by *masculine* traits. Masculine in this context does not mean the present-day stereotypical definitions of being macho, physically and emotionally "tough," and a sports enthusiast. Rather, it "connotes…autonomy, separation, and distance…a radical rejection of subject and object" (Keller, 1985, p. 79).

The concepts of emotion, reason, knowledge, body, and mind have therefore been gendered concepts. In other words, notions of male and female have influenced and shaped how the above terms have been understood, what has been said about them, and how they have been taken up in discourse. This means that to understand why emotion has been devalued in traditional western epistemology and thought, it has been necessary to understand how it is has been historically associated with femaleness (Code, 1991). As feminist scholars and the discussion thus far have shown, Cartesian dualism resulted in the perception that feminine traits needed to be overcome so as to secure truth and objectivity in the pursuit of knowledge. The denigration of emotion was therefore part of the denigration of the feminine and the extolling of the masculine. As Boler (1999) argues, this denigration "…enabled reason and masculine intellectual mastery to appear as the winner in the contest for truth" (p. xvi). In other words, it was a statement of male hegemony and power.[35]

[35] If we keep in mind the epistemic and ontological instability that began during the Renaissance and the real, felt anxiety it led to, then the desire to secure mastery over all that was perceived to propagate it is conceivable as a response. This does not justify the denigration of the feminine that it led to, but contextualizes the response. It is interesting to note that desire would be one of the passions that Cartesians would want to overcome in the pursuit of truth, yet the very pursuit is marked and motivated by desire. Feminist epistemologists (for example, S. G. Harding, 1986; Jaggar, 1989; and Keller, 1985) agree that desire and knowledge permeate one another inseparably and consequently, desire "affects[s] the form and

Feminist theory has effectively articulated how power shapes the dichotomous structures of mind/body, male/female, and reason/emotion (Boler, 1998, 1999; Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990; Zembylas, 2005). As Code (1991) writes, these dichotomies, among others, are not only hierarchically ranked, but are also governed by an instrumental assumption that the righthand term is indicative of an inferior position that should *serve* the left-hand term. In other words, the lesser term is, or should be instrumental in serving the purposes and aims of the higher term. The oppressive political implications of this instrumental assumption are easy to imagine: slavery, exploitative labour, human trafficking, and so on (Code, 1991; Plumwood, 1986). One of the oppressive political implications of Cartesian dualism has been the denigration of women and emotion. This has resulted in women being excluded from being recognized as cognitive agents (Code, 1991) and in emotion being dismissed as epistemically and ontologically relevant. The significance of this is that emotion is not "naturally" opposed to truth, knowledge, or clarity; rather, its exclusion has been the result of the ideology of patriarchal power.

The effect of power in discourses and theories of emotion is particularly evident in the form and extent of visibility afforded to emotion. In other words, power relations "determine what can, cannot, or must be said about self and emotion, what is taken to be true or false about them" (Boler, 1998, p. 14). [36] The same applies to theories of disgust.

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contents of the discourse" (Gergen, 1995, p. 363). Recognition of this inseparability emphasizes the need for historical and contextual accounts of knowledge as they structure the form and contents of that knowledge.

[36] The impact of male hegemonic power can be explicitly tracked in the historical phenomenon of hysteria. The psychological concept of hysteria is the "paradigmatic emotion" that represents the "unstable, erratic, idiosyncratic, and irrational" nature of emotions (Code, 1991, p. 47). During the second half of the nineteenth century, hysteria "swept through" the middle and upper-middle classes and was primarily diagnosed in women (Bordo, 2003). The term "hysteria" derives from the Greek word *hystera*, meaning "uterus"; the condition of hysteria was often characterized as being caused by a "wandering uterus" (Ng,

What has been said, and not said about disgust has been shaped by the legacy of Cartesian dualism and the patriarchal structures it solidified and maintained.

Locating Descartes' Impact on Theories of Disgust

Cartesian dualism equated emotion, the body, irrationality, and the feminine as the same; the impacts of this are locatable in traditional disgust theories in two ways. Firstly, disgust theories have overemphasized the corporeal elements of disgust, especially the Cartesian view of the body. Secondly, disgust theories have aligned disgust with irrationality and consequently, have been lacking in their account of disgust as meaningful epistemically and ontologically. Both ideas are in part due to the legacy of Cartesian dualism in Western thought and philosophy.

1999). As such, the historical phenomenon of hysteria was rooted in ideology related to female gender (Bordo, 2003). As Code (1991) writes, "The femaleness of hysteria is no mere accident" (p. 47). The phenomenon of hysteria exemplifies power relations determining what can and cannot be said about emotion, the ways in which it can be expressed, and the forms it is allowed to take. Moreover, it exemplifies how discourses of emotion are gendered discourses, determining and enforcing the limits of "male" and "female." Though the phenomenon of hysteria in its Victorian form has passed (the current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of Mental Disorders, published by the American Psychiatric Association (2013), no longer refers to "hysteria" as a mental disorder though the modern diagnosis of "conversion disorder" finds its roots in the diagnosis of hysteria), Bordo (2003) argues that it finds a modern counterpart. She argues that the present-day prevalence of eating disorders on a mass scale from the 1980s onwards is as unique to the culture of this time as was the "epidemic" of hysteria to the Victorian era. She argues that hysteria and eating disorders both represent an "epidemic of female invalidism", each marked by the cultural and historical contexts of their time (p. 157). Bordo concludes that this is representative of a continuum between female disorders, the production of the female ideal, and the impact of male hegemony.

The Cartesian view of the body: Disgust as "primitive"

As chapter one outlined, disgust experiences are partly defined by their visceral and corporeal elements; the stomach churns with nausea, the tongue protrudes in rejection, the corners of the mouth pull back, the head and body turn away. My critique is not that these are somehow false accounts of disgust experiences, but rather that they have been overemphasized in the research. This becomes problematic when it is motivated by unacknowledged ideals of Cartesian dualism. It is my view that the alignment of disgust with the body has been an alignment with the devalued, unnecessary, and epistemically threatening *Cartesian* body. As a result, descriptors of disgust have included antagonistic definitions as this aligns with the Cartesian view of the body as lesser than. For example, disgust has been named a "primitive" emotion (McGinn, 2011, p. 44; Korsmeyer, 2011), "basic" (Angyal, 1941), the "darkest of all the senses" (Mendelssohn, quoted in Menninghaus, 2003, p. 38), and one which requires discussing "unmentionables" (W. I. Miller, 1997, p. ix). The general meaning of these sentiments about disgust as threatening has also historically been associated with the Cartesian understanding of the body and emotions.

The heavy focus on corporeal definitions, and the over-use of denigrating terms in describing disgust demonstrates the impact of Cartesian thought on disgust research and discourse. It structures the language used to define disgust, and shapes what can, and cannot be said about disgust. This has left little room for conceptualizing disgust beyond its corporeal aspects, and/or locating embodied, corporeal aspects of disgust in language that does not deem it a lesser, "primitive," or threatening experience. This has also restricted the possibility of meaningful engagement with disgust as relevant to world-

making—it is hard to convince someone that an experience that is “primitive” and repulsive to even think about may be significant.

Descartes’ bifurcation of emotion and reason: Disgust as irrational

Just as the Cartesian view of the body is evident in current theories of disgust, so is the Cartesian alignment of emotion with irrationality. The absence of trying to understand disgust as it relates to world-making is due to the underlying conception of emotion as irrational and therefore as interference to knowing the world. In the Cartesian framework, emotion needs to be transcended; accordingly, disgust has not been considered an experience through which the world reveals itself to the knower. Its alignment with irrationality means that it is considered epistemically insignificant.

In dismissing disgust as irrelevant to world-making, theories of disgust have diminished its pertinence to processes of selfhood or intersubjective relationships. This oversight is arguably due to the Cartesian ideal of reason structuring disgust research and discourse. In Boler’s (1997) analysis of emotion scholarship, she identified four primary discourses that dominate approaches to emotion in educational studies. One of these was rational discourse, based on Western philosophical traditions, that focuses on codifying, categorizing, and universalizing emotions (ibid., p. 205) She argues that rational discourses of emotion are particularly prominent in higher education scholarship and pedagogies. The danger in rational discourse is that they threaten to separate and decontextualize emotions from the operation of power, and processes of knowledge production more generally. Furthermore, rational discourse sustains the problematic

Cartesian dichotomy of reason over emotion, and thereby preserves the valuing of mind over body, and male over female.

Though it is beyond the limits of this dissertation to do a comprehensive rational discourse analysis of current disgust theories, it is my view that this discourse is locatable even with a cursory consideration. Rational discourses are evident in three areas: the significant efforts to identify the physiological markers of disgust, the struggle to categorize fascination, and the sustained research efforts towards confirming the universality of disgust. The effort to identify the characteristic physiological markers is representative of the aim of categorization in rational discourse. Categorization is conceivably important to rational discourse as it operates on the Cartesian understanding of knowledge in which truth is revealed when objects are seen under the right circumstances, or under the "right light." Categorization therefore is an attempt to secure the right circumstances under which the "truth" of disgust will be revealed.

Similar motivations underlie the efforts to categorize fascination in disgust experiences. Fascination, however, has shown itself to be difficult to categorize. As a result, fascination has been dismissed as paradox (McGinn, 2011), the way of insanity (ibid.), and "perverse" (Herz, 2012b, p. xi). In other words, under rational discourse approaches, if fascination does not fit any conceivable category, then it must not be the "truth" of disgust and should be dismissed. This is one reason that a different approach to disgust is needed, one which is not rooted in Cartesian ideals of reason and rational discourse, so that fascination can be understood without the desire to reduce its complexities and nuances through attempts at categorization.

As I discussed in chapter one, the universality of disgust has also been a focus of research efforts. The focus on universality reflects the rational discourse approach to emotion and Cartesian ideals by rejecting the particularity of knowers. As discussed earlier, emotions were dismissed not only from the processes of knowledge acquisition, but also from being the objects of study because they were seen as interference to attaining universally valid and objective truth. But even if emotions are the subject of study as they are in the case of disgust, the aim is *still* to attain universally applicable knowledge. Under this model, the *value* of studying disgust comes from the ability to identify the conditions in which it applies or expresses universally, *not* in identifying its quirks, particularities, and differences. The "truth" of disgust is therefore determined by the aspects of disgust that are universal. If an aspect of disgust does not meet this criterion, it is either not worth examining, or then it is dismissed as paradox or threatening to one's mental health.

In contrast, feminist accounts of emotion and feminist epistemologies have operated from the assumption that emotions are relevant to knowledge and a source of knowledge themselves. Feminist approaches to disgust, however, are the minority of disgust research. As I have mentioned, Ahmed's (2004b) account of disgust is one of the few that approaches disgust as relevant to power, and to social, political structures. Nussbaum's (2004, 2010) analysis also considers disgust's significance for social and legal relations, but concludes that disgust should be overcome and replaced with a politics of humanity; disgust therefore does not have a meaningful ontological role. Regardless of these accounts, disgust has been traditionally framed by Cartesian ideals and resulted in narrow and limited conceptions.

I now turn to consider yet another dichotomy that contributed to emotion being overlooked in educational and psychological theory and practice: The Western tradition of individualism. Individualism extended dichotomous structures of thought and action by instituting a split between independence and dependence, and a complementary split between public and private. These structures continued the masculinization of thought that began in early philosophy by constructing a distinctly "male" model of the subject. It is this male subject that we find unacknowledged, yet operative at the center of traditional disgust theory and research.

The Lens of Western Individualism and Its Impacts

The history of Western individualism and its ideals are a second social and cultural context framing disgust discourses. Though Western individualism does not exist as a singular unitary entity or discourse—its iterations are plural and dynamic—its modern form is rooted in Cartesian dualism and in the history of western patriarchy. [37] More specifically, individualism's focus on detachment and objectivity are partly founded on Descartes' bifurcation of mind and body and the associated privileging of male over female. These ideals have contributed to particular conceptions of subjectivity and theories of how selfhood develops. Though it may seem like a detour from disgust to discuss theories of selfhood, it is in fact central to my argument that a more comprehensive account of disgust requires a consideration of selfhood because there has

[37] The history of Western individualism is complex and accounting for its complete history is beyond the limits of my dissertation. See the work of Charles Taylor (1989) and Jack Crittenden (1992) for thorough accounts of the history and development of individualism and its relation to concepts of the self. See also the edited collection of Heller, Sosna, and Wellbery (1986) for insightful discussions on some of the modern debates about individualism.

been an unacknowledged concept of the subject *already* at work in theories of disgust. It is this already present "subject" that I wish to examine and expose here. It is my view that the theory of the subject that marks disgust research and discourse is the ideal Western individualistic subject who is identifiable by traits of detachment, separation, and autonomy. Consequently, ideals of individualism have left little space to understand disgust as a relational, intersubjective experience that may have elements of attachment, connection, and dependence. As the discussion will show, the ideals of individualism are distinctly "masculine" characteristics, thereby calling for feminist critiques and accounts of selfhood and disgust.

Individualism is "broadly conceived as the view that the individual human subject is a maker of the world we inhabit" (Heller & Wellbery, 1986, p. 1). This view has been a foundational concept in Western thought and life for over 500 years (ibid.). Heller and Wellbery (1986) argue that autonomous individuality developed from being a telos of modernity to becoming the "principal ideology" of mass culture in the West (p. 10). The impact of individualism has also been notable in academia; it has served as the basis for modern conceptions of psychology, education, religion, and psychoanalysis and has only come into question in the twentieth century (Orange, 2011).[38] The ideology of individualism and its impacts have been so far-reaching that when critiques began to proliferate, the effects of these critiques were felt in cultural, social, and institutional spheres. Indeed, the questioning and dismantling of the "ontological foundations of

[38] The Frankfurt school of theorists made imperative critiques of issues such as hyper individualism, narcissism, and instrumentalism in Western, industrialized societies. The work of Theodor Adorno (1969), Max Horkheimer (1969), Christopher Lasch (1991), Erich Fromm (1990), and Herbert Marcuse (1987) are particularly critical. It is beyond the scope of this project to engage with the Frankfurt school's criticisms, however I wish to signal their significance.

individual identity" lead to a "modern crisis of individualism" that continues to inform discourse and debate across disciplines (Heller & Wellbery, 1986, p. 2).

Descartes' philosophy plays a role in the establishment of Western individualism, particularly in the method of reason that he prescribed. Reason was the method through which one achieved a disengaged position to view the world from. A detached, disengaged, *objective* view of the world would be removed from all that interfered with pure thought and perception (the body, senses, passions, etc.) in order to perceive truth and universal knowledge. Most importantly in the consideration of individualism, reason was a method founded *within* the subject. In other words, it was through an exercise of *internalized* will, self-control, and moral strength that one could achieve the mastery of reason, pure thought, and pure knowledge (Taylor, 1989). As Taylor (1989) highlights, "Descartes brought about a revolutionary change" (p. 142) by "situat[ing] moral resources within us" (p. 143). In other words, Descartes model establishes the source of moral power as *internal* to the individual, rather than externally as had been the prevailing, theological understanding pre-Descartes.[39]

Not only was reason the method by which to detach the subject from the world, one's own body, and the bodies of others, it *defined* the method for knowledge and truth *as* an individual exercise of will. The atomistic individual did not need anything or anyone aside from their own capacity for thought in order *to be*, or to be a subject that *knows*. Descartes (1996) himself demonstrates this principle when he asks, "But what

[39] See also the work of Hannah Arendt (1961) where she argues that Descartes' philosophy also resulted in the Western understanding of freedom being internalized.

then am I?" His answer: "A thing that thinks" (p. 19). Through this individual and private exercise of thought, one secures their existence as a subject and masters the use of reason to attain truth and certainty. The individual mind therefore became the source of being and knowledge (Crittenden, 1992).

Descartes' detached knower subsequently became the ideal model of the self. Detachment and separation were the means through which one accessed and located "the good"—pure thought, pure perception, truth, and clarity. In the face of the ontological and epistemological uncertainty of the Enlightenment, this ideal model of the self promised a remedy. Consequently, Descartes' ideal model of the self matured into the ideology of individualism and continued to establish the belief in, and valorization of the person as separate and autonomous from others.[40] A set of associated ideals accompanied this belief: reason over emotion, separation over connection, independence over dependence. Not only was the self understood to be separate from others in individualist paradigms, but it understood the self to exist *a priori* to relationship with others (Frie & Coburn, 2011b).[41] Taylor (1989) refers to this modern, Western concept of self as the "disengaged" self, where people start as "atoms" (hence Taylor's use of "atomism" to refer to this new individualism that Descartes introduces) as they are on their own (p.

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[40] Here, once again, all the blame cannot be put on Descartes alone. Though the concept of the modern self-reliant and self-possessive individual did not emerge until the 19th century (Eppert, 2008), its philosophical roots can be traced to the work of John Locke in the 17th century (Frie & Coburn, 2011). Eppert (2008) links the solidification of the individualist model of self to the birth of psychoanalysis, technological advances, the growth of capitalism, mass schooling, and the cultivation of a scientific consciousness. Though the focus of this discussion is not on the reasons for the development of individualism, it is important to recognize the cultural and social contexts that gave rise to it.

[41] This assumption forms the foundation for intrapsychic theories of the self that minimize the relational aspects of human experience as they are seen as irrelevant or secondary to how a self develops. As I will discuss later, intrapsychic models of selfhood and the autonomous, detached "self" at its core structure traditional accounts of disgust.

193). Throughout the history of modern philosophy, the concept of the human “became ever more identified with the concept of an individual, inner, subjective, self-enclosed “mind”” (Orange, 2011, pp. 43–44).

Patriarchal structures continued: The male subject of individualism

Feminist scholars have argued that the concept of the self that individualism instituted has been a concept of the *male* subject; it marks the “feminine” values of relationship, corporeality, dependency, and emotion as insignificant and lesser than (Benhabib & Cornell, 1987; Benjamin, 1988; Brown, 1998; Gilligan, 1982; S. Harding & Hintikka, 2003). In other words, individualism operates on relations of power as it serves to determine the value and visibility of certain qualities and characteristics. As we saw with the mind/body and reason/emotion dichotomies, they are mapped onto the male/female distinction and the good/bad dichotomy. Individualism maps yet another set of terms onto this “system” of dichotomies: separate/attached, or similarly, independent/dependent. The policing of these dichotomies to ensure that they remain distinct has meant reifying and valorizing the “male” terms, while denigrating and suppressing the “female” terms. This policing has served the political, social, and economic interests of patriarchal western society by ensuring that male subjects and “masculine” characteristics have been the most visible and the most valued.

The disavowal of the “feminine” has meant that dominant theories and practices across disciplines have reflected and reified patriarchal narratives of individualism. In the case of traditional educational and psychological theory, there have been limited efforts to understand selfhood in terms of relations to others and the world. This is because the

individual is conceptualized as *the* source of truth and therefore constitutes the object of study; relations with others are not relevant as "sources of being," nor as sources of knowledge in individualist paradigms. Similarly, traditional theory has struggled to take account of emotion in concepts of selfhood, and in understanding human relationships as emotions are seemingly opposed to the detached and objective ideals of epistemology.

The theoretical and lived stakes of the maleness of subjectivity are clearly articulated by Benjamin (1988): "If his way of being in the world is not simply human, but specifically masculine, then it is not universal. And this means that his way is not the only or inevitable way of doing things" (p. 189). In other words, the male subject is not the only subject position available, nor is the male perspective the only perspective on the world; other perspectives, conceptualizations, and experiences exist. Before I consider these alternatives, I will examine individualism's other notable impact on theories of emotion: the public and private split.

Individualism's spin offs: the public/private split, and the privatization of emotion

Code (1991) argues that individualism's prominence and force was in part because of the public/private dichotomy it established. As the previous section discussed, the ideal model of the self is one that is marked by detachment and independence. In this view, emotions are anything but detachment and independence; they are evidence of attachment to others, to objects in the world, and of dependence on subjective, not objective states of being. Consequently, the individualist tradition considers "emotions [to be] private matters, associated with particular, whimsical (= unruly) aspects of subjectivity" (Code, 1991, p. 243). Relegating emotions to the private sphere was therefore an attempt to

control their "unruly" influences. The public/private divide maintains that emotions should be suppressed to the private realm as they are not fit for the public eye, nor are they fit for attaining universally valid, objective, public knowledge (Code, 1991; Heller & Wellbery, 1986; Lloyd, 1984). The epistemic and ontological legitimacy of emotions is, once again, at stake in the public/private binary.

Emotions were not alone in the private sphere. Women were also historically consigned to the private realm, along with "women's histories" and "women's work" (Boler, 1999). This attests once again to the gendered nature of discourses on emotion, as well as to the gender ideology that is at the root of the public/private split (Code, 1991). Second wave feminism's slogan—"the personal is political"—is a direct challenge to the public/private binary. In brief, this slogan and the movement it represented resisted the privatization, and consequent erasure of emotions and women's experiences (often conflated to be the same thing) and reclaimed them as imperative to epistemology, ontology, pedagogy, and politics (Boler, 2015) .

The impact of the public/private split is also evident in traditional theories of emotion that understood emotion as being located within individuals. As chapter one discussed, this model has notably been called the "inside-out" model of emotions as it conceives of emotion as "owned" by individuals; emotions thereby begin internally and then move outward toward objects and others (Ahmed, 2004b; Boler, 1999). In my view, this is an additional effect of the public/private binary; not only were emotions not fit for public life or discourse, they were also not fit for the "public" parts of selfhood. In other words, theories of emotion posited emotions to be as far away from the public as possible. They had to exist inside the individual, in the private and less accessible, or less readily

accessible realms of the human being. Even if they only existed in the private realm of human life—the home being the paragon of the private—they had to be buried further still. They could not be located *in relationship* with others, they could not be constructed in relationship with others, they could have no intersubjective dimension—these would still be far too public a realm for emotions and not containment enough for the "unruliness" they invited. Rather, traditional theories of emotion conceptualized emotion via the male ideals of individualism. As a result, traditional theories of emotion formulated emotion to be an *interior* experience as opposed to an exterior, public one.

Locating Western Individualism's Impacts on Theories of Disgust

The traditions of Western individualism have shaped disgust accounts in three ways. First, individualism's reification of separation, independence, and autonomy have resulted in an over-emphasis on the elements of repulsion in disgust experiences. Second, this reification has contributed to a lack of relational accounts of disgust as these ideals maintain that selfhood develops outside of relationship with others and emotion. And lastly, the prioritization of these ideals has meant the rejection of opposed concepts and ideals such as connection and dependence, thereby leading to a minimization of the elements of fascination in disgust experiences.

The detached self of individualism and the over-emphasis of repulsion in disgust

For the theorization of disgust, individualism's impact is notable in disgust being framed in individualistic terms that idealize separation, autonomy, and detachment. In my view, this framing has meant that the element of repulsion in disgust experiences has been the

focus of disgust accounts as it is the element that enforces separation and detachment. Repulsion institutes and sustains the distance (both physical and mental) required to maintain the (illusion) of a detached individual. In other words, repulsion could be understood as one mechanism that establishes the separation and detachment that comprise the ideal self of Western individualism. It is therefore understandable why repulsion would receive significant recognition in the disgust literature; repulsion is not only one of the more visceral elements of disgust experiences, but it aligns conceptually and paradigmatically with the lenses guiding disgust accounts.

As the Gadamer (2003) epigraph of this chapter suggests, recognition of Western individualism's impact on disgust accounts is a form of "discover[ing] the other person's standpoint and horizon" that thereby allows the "ideas to become intelligible without our necessarily having to agree" (p. 303). In accounting for Western individualism's reification of detachment, the emphasis on repulsion in disgust becomes intelligible. It becomes understandable *how* current accounts of disgust came to be primarily about repulsion—the ideals of Western individualism were the horizons that set the range and limit of what could be seen about disgust encounters. This does not necessarily indicate that these sights were wrong, but it does suggest that they were contextual. Accordingly, repulsion is not the only truth of disgust and that there is more to see and know beyond the horizon that suggests it is the truth.

The autonomous self of individualism and the dismissal of disgust's relational aspects

Relatedly, the impact of Western individualism on disgust theories, notably its emphasis on detachment and the inner, intrapsychic world of the subject, has been to dismiss the

relational aspects of disgust experiences. This has included overlooking disgust's role in processes of selfhood, as the ideal subject of Western individualism is believed to develop separate from relationship with others and separate from emotional processes. Accordingly, current disgust accounts do not explicitly acknowledge that there is an already active model of selfhood—the intrapsychic model—guiding the research. The intrapsychic model of selfhood is informed and based on the ideals of individualism and therefore prioritizes autonomy and independence. As I highlighted in chapter one, this concept of selfhood and of how a sense of self develops means that other subjects in the world are considered objects that the self uses to establish themselves as autonomous and independent (Benjamin 1988). Given this view, disgust experiences are understood from the perspective of a disgusted subject meeting a disgusting object. The possibility of recognizing the "disgusting" object as another subject, let alone another subject with an equal center of being and experience, is foreclosed as the most important aspect of intrapsychic models is the individual's experience. Therefore, the individualist "self" as the guiding model of selfhood in disgust theories results in the inability to account for disgust as a relational experience that is meaningful for processes of selfhood and world-making. To do so, would be to give up on the male ideals of detachment, separation, and autonomy.

The independent self of individualism and the minimization of fascination in disgust

The minimization and dismissal of fascination in current conceptualizations of disgust is also understandable when analyzed from the lens of individualism. Given the ways that individualism prioritizes the independence of subjects, fascination in disgust has been

overlooked, or misunderstood as it does not align with these ideals. Fascination can be understood as a pull toward something (or someone) beyond the self, and therefore a framework informed by the ideals of individualism cannot account for it very well as it signals precisely the traits and experiences that individualism renounces: connection, attachment, and dependence. This possibility is threatening. If fascination as a pull toward is accounted for, attended to, or theorized as anything more than a quirk as current accounts do, it may threaten the ideal of independent subjectivity that Western traditions of individualism maintain.

Furthermore, fascination as a form of connection threatens to undo the privatization of emotion by suggesting that disgust could be a relational phenomenon as connection and a pull toward others implies a form of relationality, a form of acknowledgment that others exist and may be meaningful. In a relational configuration, fascination would no longer be an owned, private experience that draws one *inwards*, but rather, an experience that draws one *outwards*, towards the social, and public realm. Accounting for fascination in disgust experiences is therefore risky as it challenges the prioritization of the independent and internal experience of the subject.

The directionality of influence between individualism and traditional theories of disgust is arguably not so simple as it may seem in this discussion. I am not suggesting that the relationship from societal concepts of individualism to specific psychological and educational theory is one-directional. The relationship is much more complex. Martin and McLellan (2013) convincingly argue that twentieth century psychology had a significant impact on the development and form taken by American and Canadian individualism. I take this to mean that the direction of influence is in fact circular and dialogical; both

elements, societal concepts of individualism and disciplinary theories and practice, influence and inform one another. My aim has been to expose some of the effects of individualism on disgust theories in order to have a sense of how and why they have come to look the way that they do. I have attempted to expose some of the lenses that disgust has been seen through and highlight what kinds of sights have been possible (and not possible) through these lenses. In doing so, I hope to suggest that the specific forms that conceptualizations of disgust have traditionally taken are not the only possibilities; therefore, the opportunities to revisit disgust are plentiful. A feminist politics of disgust offers one such possibility and I turn to consider this next.

A Different Prescription—A Feminist Politics of Disgust

As feminist scholars worked to question, refigure, and dismantle the foundations of Western epistemology, the "lowly sisters" of reason—emotions, the body, the feminine—were brought in from the cold (Boler, 2015, p. 1491). As a result, emotions have, in Boler's (2015) words, "gained a place at the master's table" thanks to feminist efforts beginning in the 1960s (ibid.). Emotions and emotional experiences came to be understood as legitimate and relevant both politically and epistemically. Indeed, as Gregg (2006) writes, "passion, emotion and affect [are] the new frontier for politics" (p. 105). For example, Boler's (1999) work, *Feeling Power*, was significant in its articulation of a feminist politics of emotion,[42] especially for the practice of education. Amidst these shifts, however, there have been limited applications of a feminist politics of emotion to

[42] Boler (1999) is, to my knowledge, the first to articulate a theory and a practice of a "feminist politics of emotion."

the study of disgust specifically. In my view, current theories of disgust are still marked by traditional conceptions of emotion based on Cartesian dualism, and the ideals of individualism. Both are subsequently shaped by the history and legacy of Western patriarchy.

To understand why emotion has been devalued in traditional western epistemology and thought, it has been necessary to understand how it is has been historically associated with femaleness (Code, 1991). As feminist scholars and the discussion thus far have shown, Western epistemology required "feminine" traits to be overcome in order to secure truth and objectivity in the pursuit of knowledge. The denigration of emotion was therefore a part of the denigration of the feminine and the extolling of the masculine. As I have worked to show in this chapter, accounting for these conceptual alignments and social contexts is also necessary for understanding why separation and detachment have been the focus of disgust theories. Separation and detachment are masculine ideals; therefore, emphasizing and focusing on these ideals in disgust experiences and theories becomes an emphasis of the ideal male subject. In my assessment, traditional views of disgust are consequently masculinized views that foreclose the possibility of attending to fascination, connection, and attachment as they are historically "feminine" ideals.

A theoretical framework that challenges the patriarchal disavowal of the "feminine" values of relationship and attachment would significantly shift how disgust is understood, researched, and theorized. Boler's (1998, 1999) call for a feminist politics of emotion begins to suggest one such framework. A feminist politics of emotion works to politicize emotions as sites of social control, but also as sites of resistance (Boler, 1999;

Zembylas, 2005). In other words, a feminist politics of emotion is the "explicit analysis and resulting individual or collective actions that challenge the historical and cultural emotional rules which serve to maintain capitalism and patriarchical hierarchy" (Boler, 1998, p. 49-50). A feminist politics of disgust would accordingly situate disgust in the context of power relations. Power relations "determine what can, cannot, or must be said about self and emotion, what is taken to be true or false about them" (Boler, 1998, p. 14). As I have worked to show in this chapter, power has shaped what has been said about disgust, including determining what cannot be said.

Feminist theories are not a unitary body of discourse, yet their accounts of emotion and emotional expression offer the possibility of challenging historical and oppressive patterns of patriarchal ideologies. As this chapter has shown, these oppressive patterns have limited relational accounts of disgust and subjectivity, as well as foreclosed on the possibility that disgust is epistemically and ontologically significant. Accordingly, a feminist politics of disgust would make a relational account of disgust possible by affording visibility to elements such as connection, dependence, and relationality. These elements are key for reframing disgust encounters as significant for meaning-making at individual, interpersonal, and social levels. They are also important for developing an understanding of fascination as the analytical framework would no longer be invested in the individualistic ideals of separation and detachment that the element of fascination supposedly threatens. These efforts culminate in a feminist politics of disgust "reclaiming" disgust from the private sphere and challenging, resisting, and transforming the emotional rules that have shaped the experience and discourse of disgust.

In the next chapter, I will take up one approach that I believe is able to carry out the above principles and enact a feminist politics of disgust. I will apply the work of Jessica Benjamin, specifically her work on recognition, and analyze disgust encounters as moments in which the struggle for recognition unfolds.

Chapter 3.

A Feminist Politics of Disgust: Jessica Benjamin, Recognition, and Reframing Disgust

> *The subject declares, 'I am, I do,' and then waits for the response, 'You are, you have done.' Recognition is, thus, reflexive; it includes not only the other's confirming response, but also how we find ourselves in that response. We recognize ourselves in the other, and we even recognize ourselves in inanimate things. (Benjamin, 1988, p. 21)*

As I have argued, traditional theories of disgust and emotion have applied a subject-object approach to their theorizing. In a subject-object framework, there is a "radical separation" between the self and other where we are unable "to grasp the aliveness of the other" (Benjamin 1988, p. 190). In this framework, the outside world and others are always "object" and the self is "imprisoned in his mind, reflecting on the world from behind a wall of glass" (ibid.). This aligns with the "inside-out" model of emotions where emotion arises within the subject in response to an outside object (Ahmed, 2004b). As discussed in chapter two, this model believes that emotion exists "inside" first and then moves "out" from the subject as an expression of this experience (Calhoun & Solomon, 1984). In this model, it is not a significant factor whether the object eliciting an emotional response is, in fact, another subject. This leads to an incomplete understanding of disgust's relational elements, including fascination, and disgust's ethical implications. Consequently, an account of disgust's work, or the impacts it has in the world, is difficult.

One of my central arguments is that a significant effect of disgust is its impact on a subject's sense of self and a subject's relationship to others and the world. To understand this effect, it is necessary to incorporate an intersubjective theory of selfhood into the examination of disgust. An intersubjective approach offers an alternative to the traditional intrasubjective, subject-object approaches to emotion.

The intersubjective approach provides a role for emotion in processes of selfhood and for how subjects come to understand themselves, the world, and others. The intersubjective approach achieves this by positing a subject-subject framing of emotion and selfhood. Importantly, intersubjective theory suggests that the other person is central to how the self experiences their own subjectivity. In other words, the other must be recognized as another subject for selfhood to emerge (Benjamin, 1990). In doing so, intersubjective approaches seek to connect the self to the outside world and to the space between self and other. As Benjamin (1988) writes, this space is critical as it is "that space in which we know, discover, and create the world through our connection to it" (p. 193). Let us ask the question of disgust in this way then: what does repulsion and fascination signify if we reconfigure it as a meeting of two subjects, rather than a meeting between a subject and an object of disgust? When we understand disgust as an experience where the self meets the world and others, what does it allow us to know, discover, and create?

The work of feminist psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin and her interpretations of recognition provide one tool to begin answering these questions about disgust. Most significantly, a consideration of Benjamin's perspectives on recognition provides a means to address the three gaps I have identified in current theories of disgust: the inadequate

accounts of fascination in disgust experiences; the lack of understanding disgust as a relational experience that is significant for processes of selfhood and world-making; and the limited accounts of disgust's ethical implications. I will discuss Benjamin's approach to recognition in detail later, but briefly, the possibilities her theory affords for understanding disgust stem from the intersubjective approach that Benjamin uses to conceptualize recognition and for the robustness of her approach for understanding paradox, tension, and breakdown in intersubjective relations.

I have identified two "sites" of application where Benjamin's theory of recognition is useful for understanding disgust. The first is that the intersubjective framework that grounds Benjamin's perspectives on recognition posits two subjects that are both *active*. This perspective moves away from traditional intrapsychic configurations of development that conceive of the individual as a "closed system" in which the subject encounters objects that are used to establish the subject's own autonomy and absoluteness (Benjamin, 1988). The implications for understanding disgust are already emerging in this reconfiguration. The relationship between "disgusted subject" and "disgusting object" is no longer a closed system in which only the disgusted subject is active in the disgust experience. Instead, we are presented with the possibility of *numerous* active subjects in the disgust experience. In other words, a *relation* between subjects is at the centre of the disgust experience. In such an account, repulsion and fascination take on a different meaning and role, which will be explored in depth later in this chapter. Such an account has not been possible in intrapsychic models of subjectivity and emotion.

My second "site" of application will look at disgust as a process of recognition as Benjamin conceives it. I will suggest that the experience of disgust is an affective

moment in which the struggle for recognition plays out between two active subjects. Benjamin's interpretation of recognition is centered on the tension between dependence and independence and its importance for mutual recognition. She is especially interested in exploring how to *sustain* tension and repair it when it breaks down. To reframe disgust as a struggle for recognition would suggest that in the experience of disgust we are pulled between the need to establish ourselves as autonomous and separate subjects, while simultaneously being pulled towards something beyond the self, towards connection and interest with what exists beyond the singular, closed subject. As such, disgust moments can then be understood as central to the self's sense of distinctness from others, as an experience that "makes meaningful" one's actions, feelings, and experiences and consequently, moves the subject towards a realization of agency (Benjamin, 1988, p. 12).

My argument that disgust experiences align with struggles for recognition is not based on a simplified equation that a) the repulsion experienced in disgust is the same as the experience of self- assertion in processes of recognition, and b) that the experience of fascination equates to the experience of dependence as experienced in processes of recognition and therefore c) disgust *is* a process of recognition. This direct mapping across ideas is the beginning of the argument and I would like to suggest that when we take a step further to look at the *effects* of repulsion and fascination in disgust, we begin to see that the effects on the subject are similar, if not the same, as the effects of recognition. Most importantly, in this mapping of effects, it becomes evident that disgust is not a mere push away or pull towards objects of disgust, but that subjects are actively *constituted* in this push and pull and *in relationship* to the object of disgust, particularly when this object is actually another subject. By examining these effects rather than

relying on a simplified equation, we are able to understand that disgust encounters are affective struggles for recognition.

It is useful at this point to keep in mind the significance of recognition for the emergence of selfhood. Benjamin joins other thinkers such as G.W.F Hegel, Jurgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, and Jean-Paul Sartre to name a few, in arguing that the struggle for recognition that plays out in intersubjective relations is significant in processes of selfhood. In particular, Benjamin argues that the balance between assertion and recognition is central to the self's awareness that it is distinct from others; in other words, the process of "differentiation" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 12). Recognition is a form of *response* from the other that "makes meaningful the self's feelings, intentions, and actions" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 12). Relatedly, Benjamin (1988) argues that recognition allows the self to "realize its agency and authorship in a tangible way" (p. 12) as the subject comes to see that it has an impact on others and is involved in creating, sustaining, breaking, and repairing the intersubjective relation. In sum, Benjamin (1990) writes that we have a need for recognition as well as a capacity for recognizing others in return. Charles Taylor (1994) argues that the importance of recognition is "now universally recognized in one form or another…we are all aware of how identity can be formed or malformed through the course of our contact with significant others" (p. 36). Whether one agrees with the universality that Taylor claims, his comments speak to the increasing understanding that processes of recognition are central to the development of selfhood. I now turn to a more detailed discussion of Jessica Benjamin's approach to recognition. I begin by situating her approach in the literature and discipline of psychoanalysis, and then outline some of

the reasons why Benjamin's approach to recognition is useful for my examination of disgust.

Situating Benjamin's Intersubjective Theory of Recognition

Jessica Benjamin is a feminist theorist and psychoanalyst who is most known for her work on theories of recognition and her examination of gender and intersubjectivity (Benjamin, 1988, 1998). It is worth noting that Benjamin is a practicing psychoanalyst and so her work questions the clinical implications of, and intersections with, her theoretical work. Her own theorizing is continually in conversation with clinical practice, both figuratively and literally as she incorporates case studies and examples from clinical sessions to illustrate theoretical concepts "at work." Her theorizing is deeply rooted in clinical experience and in understanding the analytic process. Though my discussion here will not be taking up the clinical implications of Benjamin's understanding of recognition, I believe it highlights that this work and the resulting discussions are significant for practices, processes, and experiences outside of theorizing.

Benjamin's work is part of the relational psychoanalytic tradition that recognizes human experience as embedded within biological, social, political, and cultural contexts (Frie & Coburn, 2011b). This is in direct opposition to notions of Western individualism that valorize the individual as separate from others. Benjamin's work is part of an *intersubjective* approach, which argues that the human subject develops in and through relationship to others (Frie, 1997). Intersubjective theory developed in part as a reaction to psychological approaches that emphasized the inner experience of the individual as being separate from others and the world. As such, a central aim for intersubjective

theory is to account for how subjects relate to one another as mutually influencing and participatory subjects in the world (Benjamin, 2018).

The umbrella of intersubjective theory is extensive because the question of how subjects relate to one another is complex; the theorizing that has resulted is equally complex and varied. As Roger Frie (1997) outlines, the history of intersubjective theorizing can be separated into two general approaches. The first is the approach that follows Hobbes' work in which intersubjectivity is a struggle for self-preservation. The work of Jean-Paul Sartre (1992) and Jacques Lacan often fall under this approach. A distinguishing feature is how the relation between self and other is understood to unfold. For this first approach, the self and other are "irreconcilably divided"; there is no resolution to the struggle between self and other and as such, the relation is marked by conflict (Frie, 1997, p. 17). Another way to conceive of it is that the other presents a *limit* to the self.

The second broad approach to the question of intersubjectivity finds its beginnings in the work of G.F. Hegel (1998). Here, the other is not a limit to the self, but rather the condition of possibility for the attainment of selfhood (Frie, 1997). Rather than the self and other being divided and left in continual conflict, this approach posits the possibility of *mutual recognition*. Benjamin's approach is situated in this approach to intersubjectivity. The possibility of mutual recognition is central to her approach; she identifies it as the "real difficulty" of intersubjective theory and practice (Benjamin, 2018, p. 23).

Benjamin's work is also situated in the context of contemporary object relations theory, especially responding to and drawing on the work of D.W. Winnicott (1957, 2005), and Daniel Stern (1998). In particular, Benjamin's work is situated in feminist approaches to object relations, exemplified by the work of theorists such as Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976), and Nancy Chodorow (1999, 2014). In this approach, Freud's account of the Oedipal stages in gender differences is challenged and the question of asymmetrical power, gender, and sexuality is at the forefront (Elliott, 2002).

What is unique about Benjamin, however, is that her work attempts to invite conversation from historically divided theoretical camps in psychoanalytic feminism. As Anthony Elliott (2002) points out, psychoanalytic feminism has been divided between the Anglo-American object relations theorists and the French Lacanian and post-Lacanian theorists (p. 125). Rather than identifying solely with one theoretical approach, Benjamin's work responds to and incorporates concepts from both theoretical camps.

Benjamin's work also attempts to bridge larger disciplinary divides. Given Benjamin's focus on the concept of tension in her writing, it is perhaps no surprise that she identifies her work as being located in the "context of a tension between the disciplines of psychoanalysis and feminist theory" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 1). Her stated goal in terms of these theoretical divides and tensions is not reconciliation, but rather to "bring them into conversation with each other, not only figuratively but literally" (ibid.). In fact, Benjamin explicitly rejects being wholly determined by theoretical divides and oppositions. Instead, she writes that she wishes to "allow competing ideas to be entertained simultaneously" and to attend to the "pull" of divergent accounts and perspectives (Benjamin, 1995, pp. 4–5). Benjamin attends to the pull of competing ideas

and directions in how she conceptualizes human development and experience. Given that the experience of disgust is a "tug of war" between concepts and experiences that seem to be opposites, it seems fitting to try and understand disgust using the work of a theorist who herself feels that "the experience of being pulled in more than one direction at once is central to [her] psychic life" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 5).

The other unique feature of Benjamin's work is her engagement with philosophy, particularly with deconstruction and poststructuralism. Benjamin defends the incorporation of approaches outside of the traditional psychoanalytic realm towards what she calls an "overinclusive" psychoanalysis (Benjamin, 2004, p. 9). In particular, Benjamin names philosophy, literary critical theory, and political theory as being central to contemporary feminist thought and as necessary "vectors" for psychoanalytic theory moving forward (ibid.). Given Benjamin's engagement with philosophical and critical theory, her critics and interlocuters are diverse and not limited to psychoanalytic circles. For example, Judith Butler, Kelly Oliver, and Allison Weir are social and political philosophers who regularly engage with Benjamin's work.

Amid the strengths Benjamin brings generally as an intersubjective feminist theorist, there are more specific reasons informing my decision to use Benjamin's theory of recognition for examining disgust. Namely, Benjamin's strengths lie in her ability to account for tension in processes of recognition; the ways in which she accounts for breakdown in recognition and her ability to locate possibilities for repair after breakdown. I turn to outline these reasons in more detail next.

Strengths of Jessica Benjamin's Theory of Recognition for an Understanding of Disgust

It may seem unusual to bring in a theory of recognition to understand disgust; however, as I suggested in chapter two, current theories of disgust *already* have an implicit theory of selfhood at their foundation. Namely, this theory has been an intrasubjective approach to selfhood. Thus, to elaborate on our understanding of disgust, there must be an alternative lens of selfhood from which to examine disgust. I have suggested that applying Benjamin's theory of recognition to understanding disgust begins to meet some of the requirements that a feminist approach to disgust would demand.

Benjamin's approach to recognition is an intersubjective frame that is useful for an examination of disgust for two reasons. The first centers on the parallel tensions I have identified as present in disgust experiences and in processes of recognition. For recognition, it is the tension between asserting the self and the need for the other; for disgust, it is the tension between fascination and repulsion. In disgust, this tension has been identified but neglected, or left unexplained in research. I will be arguing that this tension is present because disgust is an affective moment where the struggle for recognition occurs. As I will discuss, processes of recognition have been shown to be central to how selfhood develops. Consequently, to consider disgust as one moment where the struggle for recognition occurs is to discover disgust's role in the development of selfhood and in how the self relates to others and to the world.

Intersubjective approaches understand the other to be central for how selfhood develops. In other words, a "sense of self" and "sense of other" are not separable because a sense of self is constructed in relationship to others; a sense of self is always already a

sense of others. Current approaches to disgust have not approached it relationally, as something that happens *between subjects*, and consequently, have been unable to make intelligible the push and pull between fascination and repulsion. This is not to say that fascination and repulsion are experiences that happen *only* between two subjects (as opposed to a subject meeting an inanimate object), but that to understand how they can be present simultaneously in an experience, and in tension with one another, requires a *relational* perspective. In other words, a perspective that could consider disgust as an experience *between* subjects, and *between* subjects and the world. Furthermore, it is my view that a robust account of disgust would require not only a relational perspective, but one that also considers emotional experience as significant to processes of selfhood. Benjamin's theory of recognition argues that the intersubjective relationship happens through affect; in other words, shared feelings and emotions are a mediating factor in relationship (Weir, 1996). A consideration of Benjamin's work is therefore one way in which the seemingly contrasting elements of the disgust experience can begin to make sense relationally.

What makes Benjamin's approach particularly interesting for my examination is how Benjamin accounts for the tension between separation and connection in processes of recognition. Benjamin proposes a framework that can hold these two seemingly opposite experiences in tension with one another without prioritizing one over the other. We are faced with the same challenge with disgust, not only to attempt to understand seemingly incongruous elements without prioritizing one over the other (as has been the hallmark of existing theories), but to try and make sense of what their effect is *in relation* to one another. In the disgust experience, there is a push away from the "disgusting" and

yet, a pull towards it. It does not suffice to say that these are two categorically separate "movements" that just happen to coincide in the same experience. Conceptualizing repulsion and fascination in disgust should not be the same as imagining flipping a light switch on and off with the light "on" being the opposite of the light "off." Our understanding of disgust shifts if it is conceptualized like a flexible and moving elastic between these two elements. Repulsion and fascination are in relation to one another and are both active in exerting an effect on the subjects involved in a disgust encounter. Benjamin can conceptualize *and* sustain tension, as opposed to enforcing a categorical difference in her approach to separation and attunement in process of recognition. A similar approach is needed for understanding disgust.

The second reason that Benjamin's approach to recognition is useful for examining disgust is that it acknowledges that there are moments when recognition *fails* and the relationships involved require repair (Benjamin, 1998; Connolly, 2010). This is particularly relevant for disgust as it raises the ethical question of how we meet the other regardless of the repulsion we may feel towards them or in our encounters with them. When two or more subjects meet and one subject gets named disgusting, this is arguably a moment in disgust when the encounter breaks down and requires repair. In such an encounter, the subject seen as disgusting is objectified into a disgusting object and treated as such. The possibility of both subjects being recognized *as* subjects is foreclosed, thereby indicating the need for repair. In my view, this is the logical question that is raised when we consider disgust as a relational experience. To understand it as an experience between subjects, rather than a subject-object encounter, brings disgust into the realm of ethics and the responsibilities of subjects to one another. This question

becomes even more imminent when the relationship fails and when harm is potentially done to the other. As chapter one discussed, disgust is an emotion that can lead to harm as the feeling of repulsion results in attempts to separate the self from the other. These attempts at separation can take violent and harmful forms.

As we saw in chapter one, the feeling of disgust can motivate violent and harmful actions towards others. Current theories of disgust acknowledge disgust's possibility for harm and violence and consequently debate whether it is a "reliable" and "valuable" emotion for guiding moral decisions (Devlin, 1959; Kahan, 1998, 1999; Kass, 1998; Kekes, 1992; Kelly, 2011; Nussbaum, 2004, 2010; Plakias, 2013). However, despite the claims that disgust is an ethical issue because violence can accompany it, what seems to be missing is an explanation of *why* it accompanies it. It is not sufficient to say violence accompanies it because we feel repulsion in the disgust encounter. Nussbaum (2010) perceptively identifies the critical ethical moment that disgust calls us to: "Seeing the shape of a human being before us, we always have choices to make: will we impute full equal humanity to that shape, or something else?" (p. xvii). Yet, *why* does disgust sometimes lead us to deny humanity? What is the "motor," so to speak, that drives the translation of the feeling of repulsion into a harmful act towards others? If something repulses us, why does this mean that we need to do anything more than move away, withdraw, and disengage from the objects that disgust us—just as the psychological research suggests is the expression of disgust? I believe we cannot understand this process until disgust is reframed as an intersubjective relation in which selfhood is negotiated. Understanding disgust as a moment where the struggle for recognition occurs

allows us to do precisely this and provides a framework for understanding *why* disgust can motivate violence.

If harm is inflicted because of disgust reactions, or violence has been justified by the feeling of disgust, then this is arguably a failure in relationship; it signals that an encounter between subjects has broken down into a relation between a subject and an object. Consequently, the possibility of repair or resolution must be considered in disgust accounts. Benjamin's theory of recognition incorporates the inevitability of breakdown and failure in relationship. As such, her discussion provides a tool to not only understand these breakdowns, but also to imagine the possibility of repair. If we take my previous suggestions that a) disgust is a meeting of subjects and that b) disgust involves a foundational tension between repulsion and fascination, then we are invited to ask the following: what does a breakdown of this tension look like and signify for subjects? Furthermore, what does reparation look like *after* breakdown? These questions lead to the third gap I have identified in the disgust literature: the limited account of the ethical question in disgust (which has not been as evident in traditional subject-object configurations of disgust).

Benjamin's work also questions the possibility of mutual recognition, what her later work (2004, 2006, 2009, 2011b, 2018) names as a "thirdness" in recognition. The concept of thirdness as understood by Benjamin, provides one possible way to approach the ethical question raised by disgust. I will examine Benjamin's concept of the third in more detail later in this chapter, but some preliminary comments are worthwhile at this point. Benjamin (1988) locates the possibility of mutual recognition in the sustaining of tension between self-assertion and mutual recognition; domination and submission result

from a breakdown of this tension (p. 12). The possibility of mutual recognition, or thirdness, suggests a model where seemingly opposing and mutually exclusive experiences can be operating simultaneously in an experience. Importantly, it incorporates failure and breakdown into the model, thereby providing a way to understand disgust's potential for harm and to question the possibility of ethical action in response to breakdown in relationship.

In short, the tension that Benjamin's work focuses on is primarily the struggle between asserting the self and gaining independence, and the need for the other. The conflict between asserting the self and the need for the other did not find its beginning in Benjamin or even in psychoanalytic theory. The clearest articulations of this struggle were made by G.W.F. Hegel (1998) in *Phenomenology of Spirit,* where Hegel struggled with the question of independence and dependence by thinking through the master-slave relationship. In some sense, following Benjamin, my discussion is in conversation with Hegel's well-known master-slave dialectic. I do not intend to take up a direct reading of Hegel as my interest is in the feminist relational psychoanalytic understandings of Hegel's work on recognition.[43] However, given that Benjamin's theory of recognition directly incorporates and responds to Hegel's work, it is important to have a cursory sense of Hegel's master-slave dialectic to understand where Benjamin differs in her approach. In brief, Benjamin disagrees with Hegel's assumption that the struggle between asserting the self and recognizing the other results in an unsolvable conflict. This

[43] The body of feminist Hegelian critique and interpretation is vast, beginning with Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). For a broad introduction to feminist interpretations of Hegel, see Patricia J. Mills' edited collection, *Feminist Interpretations of G.W.F Hegel* (2010).

difference is central to Benjamin's work and to my application of her theory of recognition.

The Clash of Consciousnesses: Hegel and the Master-Slave Dialectic

Hegel outlines his theory of self-consciousness in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1998) and articulates it through the dialectic of master and slave. Hegel's theory is a model of intersubjectivity in which other subjects are significant and necessary for the attainment of self-consciousness (Frie, 1997). Self-consciousness for Hegel arises from the struggle for recognition, through which the self is acknowledged. In other words, "self-consciousness exists only in being acknowledged" (Hegel, 1998, p. 111).

The concept of desire is central to Hegel's understanding of self-consciousness and self-knowledge. Judith Butler (2012) argues that desire is essential to Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology*, yet is often dismissed by others as the "least sophisticated project of self-consciousness" and without any "ontological role to play" (pp. 43, 45). I agree with Butler's assessment that the concept of desire is an important consideration for beginning to understand Hegel's dialectic of self-consciousness. For Hegel, desire is the character of self-consciousness and as such, the struggle for recognition can be interpreted as "permutations of desire" (Butler, 2012, p. 43). As a "being of desire" then, consciousness seeks to fulfil its desire for self-consciousness "through recognition by another self-consciousness" (Frie, 1997, p. 55). For Hegel, desire is directed at efforts to appropriate an object, and through this appropriation secure and assert its own self-consciousness (Butler, 2012; Frie, 1997; Hyppolite, 2000). The process of recognition

then is an attempt to secure selfhood as an autonomous and independent being. This is a question of ontology, of being, as “the vocation of man—to find himself in being, to make himself be—is realized only in the relation between self-consciousnesses” (Hegel, 1998; Hyppolite, 2000, p. 167). This however, leads to conflict. Each consciousnesses seeks to satisfy their desire for self-consciousness through recognition and this leads to struggle (Frie, 1997; Hegel, 1998).

The conflict between consciousnesses is introduced because each self desires recognition, but to achieve it requires the other. Hegel (1998) writes that each becomes the “middle term” for the other “through which each mediates itself with itself and unites with itself” (p. 112). In other words, self-consciousness is shown to be “that which must relate itself to *another being* in order to become itself” (emphasis added, Butler, 2012, p. 44). The struggle arises because this need for the other clashes with consciousness’ desire for establishing certainty of its being as an autonomous self. Needing the other in order to achieve my self-consciousness would mean that I am in fact, *not* the autonomous being that I am attempting to establish. Consequently, the conflict results in extremes: be the only one recognized or the only one recognizing. Hegel (1998) calls this a life and death struggle as each consciousness attempts to “raise their certainty of being for themselves to truth” (p. 114). For Hegel, recognizing the other becomes problematic for the self because self-consciousness desires to be certain only of itself and its reality; this is the only goal that it pursues (Benjamin, 1988; Hegel, 1998; Hyppolite, 2000). As Butler (2012) notes, the other is considered an obstacle to self-consciousness’ pursuit of its certainty and consequently, the life and death struggle becomes a necessity. In this model, self-consciousness’ certainty is only achieved by breaking its dependence on the other

and asserting "that it is not attached to any specific *existence*, not to the individuality common to existence as such, that is, not attached to life" (Hegel, 1998, p. 113).

The conflict between consciousnesses is the focal point of Hegel's discussion of the lord and bondsman, or master slave dialectic. The purpose of the "Lordship and Bondage" section in the *Phenomenology* is to show how the theoretical understanding of self-consciousness' relationship to the other plays out in experience (Butler, 2012; Hegel, 1998). Hegel recognized that the conceptual struggle for recognition could result in another experience: of inequality, domination, and servitude (Hegel, 1998; Hyppolite, 2000). The possibility of domination and servitude in the struggle for recognition forms the basis of the master slave dialectic.

In this meeting of hypothetical selves, master and slave are engaged in a struggle for recognition. Given that this is a life-or-death struggle, one of the consciousnesses must sacrifice itself to the other to protect its own life; in this sacrifice, it becomes the slave (Hegel, 1998; Frie, 1997). The slave consciousness becomes the "unessential consciousness" that is an object for the master; this object "constitutes the truth of his certainty of himself" (Hegel, 1998, p. 115). This however, is not the end of this struggle as self-consciousness is only fully recognized in another *independent* self-consciousness (ibid.). As such, recognition from a slave is insufficient for the master as the "essential nature" of a slave is one of dependency and living for another (Hegel, 1998, p. 115). The slave, however, must move beyond being a mediating object for the master's self-consciousness. For Hegel (1998), the slave comes to recognize itself through its production, or labour. As Hyppolite (2000) writes, "Not only does the slave shape

himself by shaping things; he also imprints the form of self-consciousness on being. Thus, in the product of his work, he finds himself" (p. 176).[44]

The intersubjective nature of Hegel's theory of consciousness is worthy of emphasis. Despite absolute independence and autonomy being the goal of consciousness, it becomes evident that this self-consciousness is only possible in relation to an other. In the master slave dialectic, "the master is master only because he is recognized by the slave; his autonomy depends on the mediation of another self-consciousness, that of the slave. *Thus his independence is completely relative*" (emphasis added, Hyppolite, 2000, p. 173). As Butler (2012) highlights, the other is an "essential structure of all experience" for Hegel, and consequently, "there can be no experience outside the context of intersubjectivity" (p. 47). In other words, the other becomes a condition of our existence and self-consciousness emerges from the relationship between self and other. The question of whether the struggle for recognition can ever be resolved is contentious and has marked philosophic debates on recognition. It is also a question that differentiates Benjamin's approach from Hegel's.

The question of *mutual* recognition that the master slave dialectic raises is particularly relevant to Benjamin's work. Given that self-consciousness' desire for independence and autonomy is opposed to the self's need for recognition, is it possible to achieve reciprocity in recognition? Is it possible to break out of the extremes of be

[44] The importance of labour and production to consciousness is taken up by the work of Karl Marx. It is not central to Jessica Benjamin's discussions of Hegel and therefore I will not spend time considering this aspect. Marx develops these ideas especially in *Capital: Vol 1* (1867) and in *The German Ideology* (1965), written with Frederick Engels. For commentary and analysis of the relation between Hegel and Marx, see Althusser and Balibar (1977), *Reading "Capital,"* as well as Althusser's (2005) *For Marx*.

recognized or be the one recognizing that lead to domination and servitude? Indeed, self-consciousness occurs through mutual recognition for Hegel (1998), where each "*recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another" (original emphasis, p. 112). In this mutual, reciprocal recognition, self-consciousness "is both a living thing for the other *and* absolute self-certainty for itself" (emphasis added, Hyppolite, 2000, p. 165). For Benjamin, mutual recognition is a central question in her work and a point of departure from Hegel. In the following section, I turn to Benjamin's critiques of Hegel and her contributions to understanding processes of recognition.

Benjamin on Recognition

Benjamin's (1988) work on recognition specifically begins in an attempt to understand the complexities of authority and desire for the other, particularly when there is resistance to recognizing the other. She argues that traditional psychoanalytic theories have been insufficient for understanding the complexities of authority, especially how authority pertains to domination and submission. Furthermore, Benjamin (1988) critiques traditional psychoanalytic theories for their lack of theorizing gender relations in relationship to domination and submission and therefore her work addressed this specifically. In Benjamin's (2013) article, "The Bonds of Love: Looking Backward," she reflects that many of the theories regarding gender that she was responding to in *The Bonds of Love* (1988) are now in the "dustbin of history" (2013, p. 9). However, most of the ideas about recognition in *The Bonds of Love*, though there is much to expand on, still align with her thinking today.

In *The Bonds of Love* (1988), Benjamin argues that the Freudian tradition assumed the subordination of women to men and thereby established the "psychological inevitability of domination" as "bedrock" in the understanding of psychic development (p. 7). Benjamin's focus is to understand this structure of domination, which she argues is at the foundation of domination in culture at large. Her interest is especially on the possibility of mutual recognition. For Benjamin, an understanding of the structure of domination is necessary for the possibility of mutual recognition as "the anchoring of this structure so deep in the psyche is what gives domination its appearance of inevitability, makes it seem that a relationship in which both participants are subjects—both empowered and mutually respected—is impossible" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 8)

Benjamin's approach begins by addressing the paradoxical nature of the relationship between self and other. This relationship is paradoxical because as the self tries to establish itself as absolute and independent, it must recognize the other as like; recognizing the other however, is a sign of dependence (Benjamin, 1988). Benjamin (1988) summarizes this struggle succinctly:

> He must be able to find himself in the other. The self can only be known by his acts – and only if his acts have meaning for the other do they have meaning for him. Yet each time he acts he negates the other, which is to say that if the other is affected then he is no longer *identical* with who he was before. To preserve his identity, the other resists instead of recognizing the self's acts ("Nothing you do or say can affect me, I am who I am"). (p. 32)

This process implies mutuality as each subject must take account of the other in trying to establish their absoluteness and reality, while the other subject is doing the same (Benjamin, 1988). Mutuality, however, is problematic for two related reasons. Firstly, the subject experiences themselves to be to be the centre of their universe. This leads to the subject searching and struggling to "enhance the intensity of that feeling" and to pursue the goal of being "certain of himself" (Benjamin, 1988, pp. 25, 33). In Hegelian terms, this is the desire of self-consciousness: to establish the truth of itself. Establishing this truth leads to tension and a struggle between independence and dependence: to establish the absoluteness of the self, the subject must take account of the other. However, accounting for the other shows the self to be in fact dependent. This is the "fundamental paradox: at the very moment of realizing our own independence, we are dependent upon another to recognize it" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 33).

Benjamin argues that this paradox leads to a struggle for control as the need for acknowledgement requires dependency on the other. If we return to Hegel's master slave dialectic, we see that for self-consciousness to be established, it requires the other to act upon and have an effect on the self. As Benjamin (1998) writes, "In order to exist for oneself, one has to exist for an other" (p. 53). The struggle arises however because these are "contradictory impulses": asserting the self and recognizing the other. We are reminded of Hegel's description of a "life and death" struggle that takes place in recognition and the resulting extremes: be recognized or be the one recognizing. For Benjamin, the struggle is precisely what can lead to a breakdown of recognition and to the exertion of domination. Domination and servitude result because there are only two options: to submit to the other or to dominate the other (ibid.). Benjamin (1988) calls this

a “dialectic of control”: “If I completely control the other, then I cease to exist, and if the other completely controls me, then I cease to exist” (p. 53).

Benjamin’s departure from Hegel: Sustaining tension and difference

A significant point of departure for Benjamin from Hegel is the question of difference. More specifically, it is the question of whether mutual recognition is possible and what it looks like. For Benjamin, the possibility of mutual recognition is based on sustaining tension between asserting the self and recognizing the other. She argues that recognizing the other is a “condition of our true independence” and that true independence is achieved through sustaining tension (Benjamin, 1998, p. 53). In sustaining this tension, mutual recognition becomes possible in that “the subject accepts the premise that others are separate but nonetheless share like feelings and intentions” (ibid.).

Benjamin’s argument for the possibility of mutual recognition is heavily rooted in studies of infancy and motherhood. The shift in infancy research in the 1980s was particularly significant in which an interpersonally active infant was “discovered.” This active infant has capacities for social engagement, differentiation, and communication that challenged traditional psychoanalytic understandings of the infant as a “bundle of disorganized drives” with only “primitive” ego actions possible (Benjamin, 2013, p. 5). This new wave of infancy research (Beebe & Stern, 1977; D. N. Stern, 1974a, 1974b; Trevarthen, 1980), especially studies focusing on face-to-face play, was important because it demonstrated the possibility of mutual recognition in early life. Benjamin, however, felt that something was missing in this research. In particular, none of the

research questioned the mother's subjectivity in these interactions (Benjamin, 2013). Given that Benjamin's research interests were in feminist theory, especially in overcoming the either/or structure of needs underlying domination, the question of the mother's subjectivity became paramount in arguing for the possibility of mutual recognition.

Accounting for both infant and mother subjectivities shaped Benjamin's understanding of mutual recognition. Consequently, Benjamin (1998) conceptualized mutual recognition as "winning the recognition of the other, and this, in turn, means I must finally acknowledge the other as existing for *him*self and not just for me" (p. 53). Critically, this is a recognition of difference, or a process of mixing "otherness and togetherness" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 12). In this understanding of recognition, the "loss of sovereignty" that the subject experiences because of acknowledging the other, is "compensated…by the pleasure of sharing, the communion with another subject" (ibid., p. 53). This is a significantly different understanding of recognition than the one presented by Hegel.

For Hegel, the breakdown of the tension between independence and dependence is inevitable as "every tension between oppositional elements carries the seeds of its own destruction and transcendence into another form" (Benjamin's translation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1988, p. 32). The Hegelian subject does not want to recognize the other and gives up autonomy and omnipotence *only* when no other options are available (Benjamin 1998). We remember that for Hegel, self-consciousness seeks to be absolute and achieves this through a negation of the other and otherness. There is no

room in this understanding of the self for the other, aside from being an object that is used to secure *one* of the self-consciousnesses that meet to struggle for recognition.

Benjamin however, raises the question of why this tension must break down at all and whether it is indeed inevitable as Hegel assumes. Though Hegel does gesture at a kind of mutuality in recognition as each subject participates in negation and recognition of the other, Benjamin argues that Hegel polarizes these terms in such a way that they are opposite and exclusive alternatives. In other words, a subject can "play only one side at a time" and consequently, "project[] the opposite side onto the other" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 63). Benjamin's refusal to polarize attunement and negation in the process of recognition is therefore another point of departure from Hegel. She continuously emphasizes that negation is an "equally vital moment in the movement of recognition" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 83). Consequently, the question of recognition for Benjamin (1998)—"how is it possible to recognize an other?"—is in fact, a question of difference: "From what position is it possible to respect difference, or rather multiple differences?" (p. 80).[45] Her answer to this is articulated in her arguments for "third space," which I will take up after examining the role of breakdown in Benjamin's approach to recognition.

[45] The question of difference has been central to feminist writing and theory, as well as to broader continental philosophical debates. Though my work invites the question of difference, it is limited to an examination of the process of recognition. It is beyond the scope of my research to engage with the rich and diverse literature on the question of difference. For an introduction to classical feminist writing on difference see Diana Fuss (2013), *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference*, and Susan Hekman (1999), *Feminism, Identity, and Difference.*

"The name of the game": Breakdown of recognition

What distinguishes Benjamin's understanding of recognition is her acknowledgement that breakdowns of the tension between asserting the self and needing the other occur repeatedly. For Benjamin (2009), breakdown and rupture are characterized by a "reciprocal lock of complementary relations," or a structure of "split complementarity" (p. 442). It is important to keep in mind Benjamin's critique of Hegel to understand what she means by complementary relations and split complementarity.[46] The split complementarity refers to the polarization of positions that is created by Hegel's model of recognition: be recognized or be the one recognizing, life or death. This, however, is not just a conceptual or theoretical phenomenon; Benjamin emphasizes that it is a phenomenological one where we feel and experience other minds through a kind of "split." Benjamin (2004, 2009) argues that this complementary dynamic expresses itself in daily interactions in various ways: doer and done-to, accuser and accused, good and bad, victimizer and victim, and so on. At the foundation of each of these expressions is a split between me/you, or a relation of "twoness." Twoness results in impasse because there is no opportunity to co-construct reality as each subject feels the need to defend their own reality, feelings, and thoughts (Benjamin, 2018). This is due, in part, to it being a relation between subject and *object*, and not subject and subject. This relation of twoness is like Hegel's master slave dialectic in that there seem to be only two options in how to relate to an other: submit to their demands or resist them (Benjamin, 2018).

[46] "Splitting" is a term that comes from the psychoanalytic literature, in particular from object relations theorists. Notably, Melanie Klein's (1935, 1945) work explored the concept of splitting.

Furthermore, the phenomenological experience of this complementary structure is that each person feels their perspective and reality to be the right one (ibid.).

For Benjamin, breakdown into complementary structures does not need to be understood as irreparable failure. Rather than "signifying failure, the emergence of breakdown and rupture can be resignified as the opening of possibility" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 136). This is not a mere reversal of terms or a romanticization of breakdown and failure, but rather a change in understanding where "failure becomes the condition for reparation" (ibid.). This conceptualization of breakdown opens the possibility of addressing the real consequences of domination, oppression, aggression, and violence that occur when recognition fails.

Consequently, for Benjamin the paradox of recognition is "resolved" (as much as it can be given that it continually repairs and breaks down), not through a final break down, but through the continuation of "*constant tension*" (original emphasis, Benjamin, 1988, p. 36). This tension is a "practice in the sustaining of contradiction": self and other, independence and dependence, fantasy and reality, assertion and recognition (Benjamin, 1990, p. 44). Tension is necessary because without it, the encounter between self and other becomes domination and aggression.

As mentioned earlier, the paradox within recognition leads to a struggle for control and can result in the subject attempting to assert omnipotence. Asserting omnipotence is a way to negate dependency on the other, which is perceived as a "threat" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 67). Benjamin argues that omnipotence can take the form of aggression or merging, but both are attempts to assimilate the other into the self to the

point of *zero tension* between self and other (ibid.). This is a breakdown of recognition as the subject becomes "encapsulated" in a closed system: "unable to make "live" contact with outside reality, to experience the other person's subjectivity" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 68). Here we begin to see why tension is central for Benjamin's understanding of recognition; without it, there is no possibility of mutual recognition and no possibility of making "live" contact with another subject. The framework Benjamin provides for understanding recognition as paradoxical and as a two-way movement between self and other is central to her contribution to theories of human development. Arguably, to understand disgust in this manner, as a *non-linear process* in which tension is vital to its operation, significantly expands current conceptualizations of disgust.

Thirdness and the possibility of mutual recognition

As previously discussed, a hallmark of Benjamin's work has been its contributions to a concept of "thirdness" in relationship and processes of recognition, including the clinical relationship. The concept of "third space" has a long history in psychoanalytic theory, notably in the work of Jacques Lacan (1988), however my discussion will focus on Benjamin's understanding of thirdness and her application of it to processes of recognition.[47] As it relates to my work, the concept of thirdness raises an interesting possibility when we consider disgust because it suggests something beyond the "twoness" of repulsion versus fascination in the disgust experience. Benjamin's attempts to describe thirdness takes on various terms and definitions in her work, such as

[47] See Benjamin's (2006) article, "Two-Way Streets: Recognition of Difference and the Intersubjective Third," for an overview of how her understanding of the third is different from Lacan's theory and Kleinian understandings of the third. In brief, the difference relates to the role of Oedipal content in conceiving of the third and to the analyst's relation to the third in clinical practice.

“thirdness,” “the third,” “shared third” and “third space,” and is further complicated by categories such as “primordial third,” “symbolic third,” and “moral third” (Benjamin, 1994, 2009, 2018). My interest is primarily on the moral third. It is tempting to try and pin down a clear and defined definition for each of the above listed terms, but this is not an easy task given the vagueness of these terms, nor is it required for engaging with or applying the concept of thirdness. I would argue that Benjamin’s use of multiple terms to explore “thirdness” reflects the complexity of the concept and its flexible nature.

A useful approach to understanding “thirdness” and its various expressions is Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (2001) concept of “family resemblances.” “Family resemblances” is used to describe a “complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing” (Wittgenstein, 2001, sec. 66). His metaphor of rope or thread is particularly useful: “And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres” (Wittgenstein, 2001, sec. 67). In examining the concept of thirdness, the strength of our understanding does not come from identifying one fibre, one meaning or definition that represents it, but rather, as Wittgenstein writes, in the overlapping and multiplicity of understandings and definitions that make up the concept of “thirdness.”

At a general level, the concept of a “third space” becomes necessary because of the effects of “twoness,” or of complementary relations. I outlined some of these effects in the previous section. It can be said that the various effects contribute to an overall impact of reducing subjects to objects and impeding the recognition of others as subjects with equivalent centers of feeling, thought, and action. In other words, mutual recognition where “each person experiences the other as a ‘like subject,’ another mind who can be

‘felt with,’ yet has a distinct, separate center of feeling and perception” is hindered (Benjamin, 2018, p. 22). As Benjamin (2004) argues, when mutual recognition is lacking and a relation of complementary is in place, there is an “unresolved opposition” between subjects, which leaves them unable to process or resolve conflict and unable to co-create reality.

The “third” becomes a necessary “vantage point” outside of the complementary structure. Benjamin (2018) highlights that the “third” is not just a point of observation, but also an interactive process and “intersubjective mental space” that facilitates mutual recognition (p. 8). Creating a “shared third” shifts the relationship between self and other from being a complementary structure of “doer and “done to” towards being a “continual exchange of influence” (Benjamin, 1988, p. 49). Similarly, the phenomenological experience shifts significantly in comparison to the experience of complementary twoness. Rather than being an experience of action-reaction, doer and done-to, a shared third is experienced as a “cooperative endeavour,” as “invent[ion] and discover[y]” (Benjamin, 2018, p. 31). Benjamin suggests that one way to conceive of this relation of thirdness is to ask, “‘Who created this pattern, you or I?’” The paradoxical answer is “Both and neither” (ibid.). This example effectively demonstrates the co-creative and interactive aspects of thirdness; as Benjamin (2018) highlights, thirdness is not a “thing” to be acquired and used like a tool, but rather it is created in relationship with others again and again.

Benjamin introduces the idea of the moral third because of the “inevitability” of failure and things “going wrong” in relationship. The “moral third” for Benjamin is the ability to “sustain the tension of difference between my needs and yours while still being

attuned to you"[48] (Benjamin, 2018, p. 27). The moral third becomes most significant for the question of repair, for the possibility of restoring mutual recognition, as it refers to the "values, rules, and principles of interaction that we rely upon in our efforts to create and restore the space for each partner in the dyad to engage in thinking, feeling, acting or responding rather than merely reacting" (Benjamin, 2009, p. 442). Benjamin (2006) calls these the "principles of lawfulness" that inform the "movement from breakdown to renewal" (p. 120). A central component of the moral third is an *expectation of failure* (Benjamin, 2006). This expectation is not just that breakdowns will happen, but also that they can be acknowledged and then repaired or mourned.

Is it possible to imagine what "thirdness" might *feel* like for subjects or what it could look like experientially? One "sign" of thirdness for Benjamin (2009) is the "capacity to hear multiple voices"; in other words, the ability to hear my own voice *without* negating the voice of the other, as well as being able to hear more than one part of my own voice (p. 442). Another way that it is experienced is as an *intention* to connect to others; this intention then results in self-observation (Benjamin, 2018). This self-observation is an observation of various elements: the acknowledgement that the self has contributed to breakdown (and is not just the one "done-to"), that the self has multiple voices as does the other, and the awareness that the self will survive being the cause of pain (Benjamin, 2009). For Benjamin (2018), this self-observation creates a connection to "a larger principle of necessity, rightness, or goodness" (p. 26).

[48] Benjamin also refers to the "moral third" as the "third in the one." I have chosen to use "moral third" in my discussion as it is more closely related to my application of the concept of thirdness to the issue of disgust. In particular, to the ethical question that is raised by disgust.

In my understanding of Benjamin's discussion of the moral third, the core concept is responsibility. Indeed, Benjamin (2018) argues that the moral third is only accessible by taking responsibility. Taking responsibility has two forms: firstly, as an acknowledgement that the self contributes to the intersubjective process, and secondly, as an acknowledgement that the self can, and does, contribute to pain, breakdown, and failure in the relationship. Taking responsibility is significant because it breaks the "ping-pong" game of complementary relations between self and other where "I" is opposed to "you" (Benjamin, 2018, p. 33). It means that the feeling of one person being the "doer" and the other person is "done-to" is no longer possible as both are "doers" in the relationship. This shift is a clear result of Benjamin's intersubjective framework and represents her continued efforts to challenge the subject-object understanding of human experience that marked traditional psychoanalytic approaches. In the last section of this chapter, I will consider the implications of the moral third for an understanding, or practice of disgust. Before doing so however, I return to the concept of breakdown in the next section.

Breakdown, again, and the possibility of pleasure

The inevitability of breakdown is paramount to Benjamin's understanding of intersubjectivity and recognition. "Thirdness always collapses into twoness" and the opposition of "my" versus "your" reality is activated again and again (Benjamin, 2018, pp. 39). Therefore, just as processes of recognition "return" to breakdown, so I return to it in this discussion; by doing so, I wish to enact in my writing the inevitability of breakdown, of how central breakdown is to being in relationship with others. In other words, breakdown is "built into" the psychic system (Benjamin, 1988, p. 223).

Benjamin's ability to integrate failure and breakdown into her model of recognition is in part because of her ethical commitments. She argues that any conception of the subject must be able to account for our capacity for destructiveness. For Benjamin (2006), the ability to acknowledge breakdown and take responsibility for failure and loss is not only an ideal, but a "practical perspective" necessary for negotiating personal and social relations (p. 121).

Importantly, thirdness is not a final "way out" of twoness; it is not a magical solution to create mutual recognition. Mutual recognition "necessarily breaks down" (Benjamin, 2013, p. 6). Yet Benjamin understands this breakdown not as a signal of failure or the impossibility of repair, but rather as an imperative of "participating in a two-way interaction" (Benjamin, 2018, p. 39). In other words, it is the "name of the game" (Benjamin, 2013, p. 6). This was a significant contribution of Benjamin's work: that mutual recognition is not just about accommodation and being attuned to others but has an element of breakdown *as well*. But what is perhaps even more striking is her argument that there is some *benefit*—pleasure–from the process of *recreating* mutual recognition after a breakdown.

Benjamin argues that intersubjective theory introduces the possibility of pleasure. This pleasure is derived from "being with the other" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 31). This "being with" is partly the pleasure of sharing in a feeling across two minds that one is aware are separate. Any "loss of sovereignty" from this mutual recognition is made up by the pleasure derived from sharing and being in "communion" with the other (Benjamin 1988, p. 53). This is a very different model than what Hegel proposed where "giving" recognition is experienced as negative. Benjamin (1988) not only posits the possibility of

mutual recognition, but argues that it is possible to enjoy giving recognition, where the "unpredictable" other becomes a source of joy. This is not only significant in the reframing of the experience of recognition, but also because it suggests that our "sense of agency and power come from giving and not merely receiving" (Benjamin, 2013, p. 7). This pleasure is especially notable during repair processes wherein both subjects acknowledge the impact the other has on them, as well as the impact they have on the other; from this basis of acknowledgment, they work together on the relationship (the "third"). In the following section, I seek to reframe disgust through Benjamin's understanding of recognition, and will question the possibility of pleasure in disgust, specifically whether the element of fascination in the disgust experience is an indication of possibility for experiencing the pleasure of mutual recognition.

The Meeting of Subjects: Disgust through the Lens of Recognition

At this point, it is useful to recap the gaps in the disgust research that I outlined in chapter one and which I aim to address using Benjamin's approach to recognition. Three gaps are central to my discussion: first, the inability to understand fascination in the disgust experience as it has seemed incompatible with repulsion. Second, the lack of framing disgust as a relational experience between subjects and thereby significant for processes of selfhood and world-making. And third, an insufficient account of the ethical implications of disgust. I see these gaps as related in that the lack of framing disgust relationally has meant that fascination and the ethical implications of disgust are hard to understand. Consequently, a relational approach to disgust provides the possibility of understanding fascination differently, as well as positioning us to think through the ethical questions of disgust more thoroughly.

I would also like to remind us of the key "tools" that Benjamin provides for my discussion. Benjamin presents us with a model of selfhood in which the struggle for recognition is central in coming to a sense of self. This struggle occurs through affect and takes places between two active subjects. Lastly, Benjamin argues that breakdowns in the intersubjective relationship are central and "part of the game," yet they do not signal failure but rather, gesture at the possibility of repair, pleasure, and mutual recognition. With these tools in hand, I want to look at the experience of repulsion and fascination in the disgust encounter. I will also consider the impact of the disgust encounter on the subject that has been named "disgusting" and what effect this may have on processes of selfhood. Lastly, I will consider the role of breakdown in disgust encounters and explore the possibility of repair.

Repulsion as the assertion of independent selfhood

The experience of repulsion is centered on creating distance between the disgusted subject experiencing disgust and others. In this regard, it is an experience that creates a boundary around the self and attempts to protect it. This explanation, though compelling, is incomplete. It considers repulsion in isolation from fascination and therefore is only able to capture one of the effects of the disgust experience. I agree that the experience of disgust is about a relation between self and other, however, I would like to suggest that the feeling of repulsion is one element of a struggle for recognition. More specifically, repulsion is the affective experience of attempting to secure recognition from the other to establish the self as an independent and autonomous being.

As we recall from the discussion about recognition, intersubjective theorists understand it to be a central process in how selfhood emerges. Drawing on Hegel, Benjamin shows recognition to be a struggle between the self affirming its own absolute independence, yet needing the other to do so. This need for the other "compromises the self's absoluteness" and exposes the limits of self-assertion and independent selfhood (Benjamin, 1990, p. 39). Thereby, the struggle for recognition is marked by a tension between independence and dependence, negation and attunement. I interpret the repulsion experienced in the disgust encounter as the "feeling of" the struggle for recognition. It is the feeling of wanting to be sure of the self as autonomous and independent. This assurance is sought by the movement of repulsion in disgust; when we are repulsed, we try to push others away to create distance and through this distance, feel distinct, autonomous, and independent from others. As Benjamin (1990) highlights, in the struggle for recognition the self says, "'I want to affect you, but I want nothing you do or say to affect me, I am who I am.'" (p. 39). The feeling of repulsion—that overwhelming urge to push away from the "disgusting object," to get as far away as possible from it, to expel it—is not just about escaping from "disgusting objects" because they are offensive to the senses or threaten the physical body. The feeling of repulsion arises from the self's attempts to secure absolute identity and certainty of itself as a being in the world. This certainty is seemingly only established by negating any kind of dependency on the other. Repulsion, in its push away from disgusting objects, is trying to negate this dependency by operating in and managing an "economy of proximity" (Ahmed, 2004b); this economy depends on contact between bodies. By lessening contact with other bodies through the

enactment of repulsion, the self attempts to assert precisely that "nothing you do or say can affect me."

At first glance, this may seem like a different wording of existing research: disgust is about separating the self from the "disgusting" that is interpreted as threatening. However, if we understand disgust experiences as struggles for recognition, then the threat to the subject is not just a threat to physical safety or to the various manifestations of the "self-boundary" that Rozin et al.'s (2000) work identified (sex, hygiene, death, violations of the body "envelope," and socio-moral violations). Rather, the threat is to the subject's very sense of distinction as a separate and autonomous being in the world. This sense of distinction is the basis for acting in the world, for locating the capacity for agency and authority (Benjamin, 1988). Therefore, this threat carries immense consequences for the subject as the stakes are high in the disgust encounter. Selfhood is at stake. As Butler (2012) writes, "every confrontation with an external reality is at once an alienation of the subject; *difference threatens the subject with annihilation* until the subject can discover that difference is an essential moment of itself" (emphasis added, pp. 45–46). Through a recognition framework, we begin to understand why disgust *matters* for subjects. We begin to understand why it can engender aggression and violence: disgust can be experienced as signalling real danger to a subject's "sense of self."

One theory of selfhood that begins to capture the significance of physical embodied experiences for a sense of self, is the concept of the *skin ego*, proposed by French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu (1989). The skin ego was the idea that the physical skin represented a "psychic envelope" that "contains and retains inside it the goodness and fullness" that grows through experiences at the surface of the body (such as bathing

and feeding), particularly experiences with the mother (p. 40). It also functions to establish barriers and "filter" exchanges with the outside world. In other words, the skin plays a role in forming an "interior" sense of self and protecting, literally and figuratively, this interior. I raise Anzieu's concept here because it gestures at how experiences at the boundaries of the body, threatening or not, impact the subject's sense of self. Furthermore, when these experiences are perceived as threats, they are not threats *only* when they occur at "openings" in the body (a familiar and much-discussed concept in psychoanalytic and critical theory) but have an effect across the entire surface of skin. In a similar vein, my discussion here is not focused on what disgust objects are the "most" threatening, what bodily openings are affected by disgust "the most," as it is my argument that disgust encounters have an active role to play in processes of selfhood.

In framing disgust as a struggle for recognition, we begin to understand why repulsion can feel so overwhelming in the disgust encounter. It is not necessarily because the disgust object is in and of itself so offensive that it requires that we heave and gasp in response; rather, the significance that it carries for the self seemingly requires it. This reframing also provides a framework to understand why disgust can be triggered even when we are not in direct contact with a "disgusting" object. This is because what is at stake in disgust encounters does not get resolved once physical contact with the object of disgust has ended. What is at stake is selfhood and our "sense of self." Selfhood is inescapable; our sense of self "accompanies" us wherever we may go and therefore, the struggle to maintain that selfhood also accompanies us, whether the object of disgust is physically present or not. Adding to the complexity is the fact that selfhood is not fixed. Rather, selfhood is an ongoing process and thereby the "certainty" or "truth" of the self is

constantly being negotiated and re-established. Disgust encounters and reactions can therefore linger and "stick" with the self as continuations of the struggle for recognition. As theories of recognition highlight, struggling for selfhood is not a singular event, but rather a struggle we are called to again and again. This struggle can be invoked through even imaginary or distanced "meetings" with other subjects. A sense of self is never absolute, especially when it is understood in the framework of recognition where a sense of self is forged in the tension between independence and dependence, negation and attunement.

By reframing repulsion in disgust as a moment where the self struggles for recognition, we can also understand the tangible possibilities for violence and aggression that are fuelled by the experience of repulsion in disgust. Benjamin's consideration of domination is useful for understanding the relationship between disgust and aggression. Domination is fuelled by a fantasy of omnipotence that will establish the autonomy and independence of the self. As Benjamin (1988) highlights, "domination begins with the attempt to deny dependency" (p. 52). This results in a "void" where the other should be; the void is filled with "fantasy material in which the other appears so dangerous or so weak-or both- that he threatens the self and must be controlled" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 220). Repulsion in disgust is an attempt to institute this omnipotence and the distance, sometimes through violence, required to assure the feeling of distinctness. Benjamin (1988) articulates that this distancing can create a vicious cycle: "the more the other is subjugated, the less he is experienced as a human subject and the more distance or violence the self must deploy against him" (p. 220). The same cycle can be seen in the disgust encounter. The feeling of repulsion pushes me away from the other and

objectifies them in an attempt to secure my own certainty as a subject. Consequently, more violence becomes necessary to continue reducing subject to object (as subjects are *not objects* and therefore are continuously "disrupting" being categorized as "object") as this reduction is necessary for my feeling of being a separate and autonomous being.

This reinterpretation of disgust as a struggle for recognition is significant because it calls attention to disgust's role in processes of selfhood. This is noteworthy in itself, but also in a broader context where emotions and feeling have traditionally been discounted from the pursuit of knowledge and consigned to the private and "feminine" realms. As I outlined in the introduction, one of my guiding questions in approaching disgust is to consider, "what does it *do*?", rather than the traditional approach of asking, "what is it?" Approaching this question with a theory of recognition shows that part of what disgust *does*, or attempts to do, is negate dependency on others and engender a sense of self that is autonomous and independent. This is the "work" of repulsion in disgust.

If the element of repulsion is considered in isolation, however, and without a framework that considers disgust's role in processes of selfhood, then our understanding of what disgust *does* is incomplete. It is not only incomplete in the sense that it overlooks other effects of disgust, but also in that it misunderstands the effect of repulsion that I discussed earlier. In other words, it decontextualizes the effect of repulsion (negating dependency and attempting to institute a sense of self as autonomous and independent) by not considering it in relationship to fascination or to the larger process of recognition. By framing disgust as a struggle for recognition, repulsion is no longer aimed at *only* instituting separation from the other. Rather, it is about the effect it has on the selfhood of the subject and how this effect occurs in relationship to the experience of fascination.

A more comprehensive understanding of disgust's effects is possible when repulsion is examined alongside fascination and with the concept of recognition. The tension between repulsion and fascination in disgust is about the emergence of selfhood and the struggle to establish "certainty" of the self. Establishing the self's "certainty" is a *struggle* between self and other, a struggle that does not have *only* separation as a possibility, but also mutual recognition. This is the possibility that becomes available when we consider repulsion and fascination alongside one another. An account of fascination reveals disgust's work to be not only separation, but gestures at the possibility of attunement and mutual recognition.

Fascination as the possibility of attunement

As chapter one highlighted, fascination is a difficult element of disgust both in its experience and in our theorizing of it. Accordingly, current approaches to disgust have labelled fascination "upsetting" and a "terrible attraction" that "panders to an underside of human nature that ought to be quashed rather than cultivated" (Korsmeyer, 2011, pp. 6, 42). One could say we are repulsed by the presence of fascination in disgust and this repulsion keeps us at bay from engaging with it in a meaningful way. Benjamin offers a way to understand this repulsion of fascination. She (1988) argues that the subject-object structure of domination is so pervasive that it "thoroughly permeates our social relations, our ways of knowing, our efforts to transform and control the world" (p. 220). The same logic has directed our "knowing" of disgust, whether it be our ways of knowing and experiencing it in everyday encounters or whether it be in our research and academic ways of knowing. The consequence of this logic is to "foreclose" the intersubjective realm and as such, foreclose on the possibility of mutual recognition. As we have seen,

Benjamin (1988) argues that sustaining tension between contradictory forces is the way to oppose the subject-object structure of domination, or the "logic of paradox."

When a logic of paradox is applied to an understanding of disgust, it affords us a different perspective of fascination that does not dismiss or overlook it as an oddity in disgust experiences. As I have argued, Benjamin's approach to recognition provides a way to locate fascination *alongside* repulsion. I am not looking to reverse the terms in disgust (that disgust is "more" about fascination than repulsion), or to valorize fascination over repulsion in the experience of disgust. Such a reversal can be tempting and may be an appealing interpretation of my arguments, particularly given the extent that binaries structure intellectual discourse and theory. Rather, I am arguing that to dismiss or diminish fascination in the experience of disgust provides an incomplete understanding of the disgust experience. Furthermore, considering the possibilities presented by fascination in disgust does not equate to undertaking a "positive" reclaiming of disgust, or to make superficial and colloquial, clichéd arguments about "finding the silver lining" in a "negative" encounter, to find "beauty" in the "ugliest of 'ugly feelings'" (Ngai 2005, p. 335). Addressing fascination in disgust is significant for developing a more comprehensive understanding of disgust, one that does not dismiss fascination as an oddity or an inexplicable vestige. It is also significant for putting Benjamin's arguments into practice: a sustaining of tension between contradictory terms, of creating space for the simultaneous activity of repulsion and fascination.

Before reframing fascination using Benjamin's theory of recognition, I wish to propose a broader understanding of disgust than what the literature has traditionally employed in analysis. My own understanding of fascination in disgust experiences does

not necessarily equate it to a positive attraction or delight. Here it is useful to return to the Latin root of fascination: *fascinare* meaning "to bewitch" or "enchant," which comes from *fascinus* meaning "a charm, enchantment, spell, witchcraft." The imagery conjured here is of being cast under a spell *that is difficult to resist,* which is not the same as "attraction." Angyal's (1941) description of disgust captures this well when he writes that disgust has an "almost living tendency" with the capacity to "sneak up on, and to penetrate, the body" (p. 397). Angyal's characterization corresponds with the Latin definition of fascination; a "living tendency" suggests an allure that is beyond our control—it seemingly has its own life. Similarly, W.I. Miller (1997) argues that disgust has a power to allure and this power is "something we are quite often conscious of even as we turn away" (p. 110). "Allure" parallels the Latin roots of fascination as it suggests a seduction, or a luring that is beyond our control. These characterizations of fascination in disgust do not necessarily connote a positive experience.

Consequently, I understand fascination to mean a pull *toward* something, an interest, a draw, rather than a universally "positive" experience. Though "fascination" may not always be the most applicable term, it captures a *constellation* of terms and experiences that refer to the "pull towards" that is experienced in disgust. In some instances, "fascination" is indeed an appropriate naming of this experience. In other circumstances, however, "interest," "curiosity," or "being compelled" may be more accurate descriptions. My use of the term "fascination" in my analysis therefore concerns the constellation of terms it invokes.

In reframing disgust as the struggle for recognition, fascination can be understood as the expression of desiring attunement with the other. As discussed earlier, the struggle

for recognition is marked by tension between negation and attunement. Attunement is seemingly at odds with the self's desire to be affirmed as an independent and autonomous subject. Consequently, attunement and anything suggestive of attunement is actively denied. I argued that the attempt to assert independence was the "work" of repulsion in disgust and I will suggest here that fascination in disgust is the "pull" towards others, towards attunement, that makes up the struggle for recognition in disgust encounters. I do not mean to equate fascination with only a positive interest; at a basic definition, fascination is an *interest* in something that is compelling to us.

In *The Bonds of Love,* Benjamin (1988) clearly lays out how attunement with the other has become theoretically and culturally associated with "cast-off" femininity and opposed to the symbol of the father who represents autonomy and liberation from dependency. This psychic repudiation of femininity is significant as it signals a denial of dependence, connection, and mutual recognition (ibid.). In this repudiation, recognition is made one-sided in which "the two central elements of recognition—being like and being distinct—are split apart" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 170). It is not my focus to summarize this developmental process that Benjamin lays out,[49] however, I do wish to highlight Benjamin's emphasis on dissolving the dualism between autonomy and dependence. Attunement with the other does not need to signal a loss of self. In other words, connection to the other does not need to threaten the sense that "I" exist as separate and distinct from others. It does not need to be a "dangerous force[]" that "threaten[s] to cancel all strivings toward differentiation" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 175).

[49] See the chapter "The Oedipal Riddle" in *The Bonds of Love* (Benjamin, 1988).

As I discussed in chapter one and two, fascination has been characterized as an upsetting and unintelligible element of disgust encounters. Reframing disgust as a struggle for recognition gestures at why fascination may have been characterized in this way. Just like with repulsion, fascination is *not* about the objects of disgust being so repulsive and offensive that any attraction or interest in them is incomprehensible. Rather, fascination is experienced and theorized as "terrible" because of what is at stake in the feeling of fascination: a sense of self. Without an analytic framework that considers selfhood as an intersubjective process and one which occurs with and through emotion, this is difficult to see. It is arguably why attempts to even articulate *why* fascination might be so terrible (let alone what it is *doing* in disgust) have been vague and dismissive. In the framework of recognition, we can see that fascination is felt as threatening because it portends a dissolution of a distinct centre of self. As Benjamin (1988) argues, attunement is "experienced as dangerously close to losing oneself in the other" (p. 170). Similarly, fascination can be experienced as a pull towards "losing oneself."

I am not equating fascination with attunement in exactly the ways that Benjamin describes attunement. For Benjamin (1988), attunement can involve "sharing states of mind, empathically assuming the other's position, and imaginatively perceiving the other's needs and feelings" (p. 170). It can be a kind of "contact" with the other's mind in shared feeling (p. 30). I do not think that fascination in disgust is this "level" of contact with another mind, but I do think it suggests an interest for something beyond the self. By understanding disgust as the struggle for recognition, fascination is the pull towards contact with the other. The desire or pull towards this kind of contact with others is understandable in a framework of recognition where selfhood is constituted in

relationship with others. In other words, selfhood has a "need" for contact with other subjects in order to be recognized as a speaking, feeling, acting subject in the world. Therefore, fascination gestures at the possibility of responding to the disgusting object *as a separate subject* and thereby for mutual recognition of others as equivalent centers of being. As Benjamin (1988) argues, contact with others, particularly contact that is the *giving* of recognition to an unpredictable other can be a source of joy rather than a source of anxiety about "losing" one's sovereignty. Similarly, fascination does not need to be a signal that one may lose or is about to lose their sense of self, but rather, it can signal that a connectedness to others exists (my "sense of self" is a "sense of others") and that mutual recognition is possible. I am not arguing that fascination equates to a "giving of recognition," but rather that it signals at its possibility. Fascination in disgust therefore does not need to be a "terrible" attraction, but rather a promising one. This promise is not for a final "achievement" of "blissful" mutual recognition—breakdown is an inevitable part of the intersubjective relation—but the promise that there are possibilities beyond "being recognized" or "giving recognition," of being disgusted or being disgusting, being repulsed or being fascinated.

This is a significant clarification from existing theories that have dismissed fascination in disgust as paradox and an inexplicable idiosyncrasy that is at odds with disgust's "true" nature. In Benjamin's language, it *is* a paradox in that it exists alongside an opposed force, however, it is a paradox that is central to processes of selfhood and intersubjective relations. As we have seen, Benjamin encourages a logic of paradox as it challenges the structure of subject-object in which mutual recognition is impossible. The paradox of fascination *and* repulsion in disgust is thereby an indication that the logic of

domination is not the only possible way of experiencing disgust (of reducing the other to object). Accordingly, it is possible to imagine disgust as a meeting of subjects and therefore I would like to consider the “other” subject in the disgust encounter—the one who has been named “disgusting”—and explore whether reconceptualizing disgust as a struggle for recognition allows a different understanding of this subject position and visibility for other elements of the work disgust undertakes.

Self as “the disgusting”—Sartre’s theory of the look

Central to my approach to disgust has been a framing of the disgust experience as a meeting of two active subjects. In many respects, my discussion thus far has only focused on one of these active subjects: the subject experiencing disgust, experiencing the push and pull between repulsion and fascination towards what has been named as disgusting. What is equally important however, is to question the significance of the disgust encounter on selfhood for the subject that has been named “disgusting.” In my view, this is one of the logical questions that arises and must be addressed when we reframe disgust as a subject-subject encounter, rather than a subject-object encounter. If the subject position of the one who has been named “disgusting” is not considered, then my approach to disgust would continue to prioritize the experience and actions of the one who feels disgusted. As I showed in chapter one, this prioritization has limited how disgust in conceptualized and understood. I will approach my exploration of the “disgusting” subject position through the frame of intersubjectivity and recognition, though I recognize that this question has alternative approaches through concepts such as

stigma, labelling, and other sociological and psychological theories.[50] In particular, I will draw on the work of Jean-Paul Sartre (1992) and his discussion of the intersubjective encounter and analysis of "the look" in his text *Being and Nothingness*.

Sartre draws on the philosophy of Hegel to construct an account of self-consciousness and intersubjectivity and therefore Sartre's work aligns well with the analytic frameworks I have used thus far. I am aware, however, of Sartre's (1992) problematic suggestions that the feminine body and its significations are precisely what need to be transcended in order to achieve freedom (see *Being and Nothingness*, section IV). In this sense, Sartre does not align with the feminist politics of disgust I wish to advance in this dissertation. I am also aware of critiques that Sartre's concept of the look is a philosophy about men as it is framed and exemplified by a story about a man encountering another man; these critiques argue that Sartre is therefore not useful for analyzing systemic or structural oppression, nor for considering female perspectives (Gatens, 1986). I do not think that this possible interpretation of Sartre's broader project undermines the usefulness of his concept of the look for my purposes here. [51]

I invoke Sartre's discussion of the look as it is useful in considering what effect the "gaze of disgust" can have on a subject. In many respects, Hegel's dialectic of master

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[50] For example, see Goffman's text (1963) *Stigma: Notes on the management of Spoiled Identity*, Howard Becker's (1963) foundational work on labelling theory, *Outsiders; Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, or Albert Memmi's (2003) work on the psychological effects of social stigma in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.

[51] Given that I am only engaging with this particular concept of Sartre's work, it is beyond my scope to engage in a comprehensive critique of Sartre's larger philosophical project. For feminist critiques of Sartre's view of the female body, see Lloyd (1984), especially chapter six, "The struggle for transcendence," Gatens (1986), and Grosz (1994), especially chapter eight, "Sexed Bodies."

and slave could allow for this by examining the experience of the slave position. However, in my view the concept of a “gaze” or “look” of disgust is more advantageous for considering the position of the “disgusting” subject. This is especially because Sartre locates the look in “everyday” experience. As a conceptual tool founded in the everyday (as disgust is), it connects us to the experience of being labelled disgusting in a way that imagining the “slave” position is less apt to do.[52] Examining the effect of the gaze of disgust reveals yet another aspect of the work that disgust undertakes.

Sartre’s discussion of the look occurs in his analysis of the experience of shame. Sartre examines shame as it represents an experience in which the experience of the self cannot be separated from the experience of the other. In Sartre’s understanding of shame, it cannot be felt when we are alone[53] and therefore is emblematic of recognition: needing the other “in order to realize fully all the structures of my being” (Sartre, 1992, p. 303). In paired down terms, the look, exemplified by the experience of shame, is about a relation between self and other.

[52] Furthermore, I do not want to decontextualize the term “slave” by using it removed of its historical context, nor to suggest that slavery is *not* an everyday experience for some. For people of colour, slavery *was* an everyday experience during the Translatlantic slave trade of the late 18th and early 19th century. Slavery has also included Indigenous peoples across North America. The history of the slave trade continues to shape the everyday lives of Indigenous people and people of colour today; I therefore intentionally choose not to use Hegel’s position of the slave to examine disgust as it does not represent the current historical and contextual meanings of the term “slave.” Furthermore, it would be inappropriate for me to try and consider disgust from the subject position of the slave as this is a position I can never know as a white settler in Canada.

[53] It is worth noting that this perspective on shame—that it cannot be felt outside of direct encounter with another—is debated in shame research. Research on the experience of shame is extensive and spans the disciplines of psychology, sociology, philosophy, cultural studies, and sociology. It is beyond the focus of my discussion here to examine shame, however, in my view Elspeth Probyn’s (2005) text, *Blush: Faces of Shame* as well as Luna Dolezal’s (2015) book, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, provide excellent feminist discussions of shame and its implications for ethics and subjectivity.

The concept of the look is central for Sartre's understanding of a "primary" or "fundamental" relation between self and other. The look—the state of "being-seen" by another—is the experience in which the other is "given to me directly" and consequently is distinguished from other objects in the world (p. 341). Sartre emphasizes that the look is not a supernatural or indescribable event but is embedded in everyday life and reality. Everyday life and reality is precisely where others appear to us: "ordinary appearances" (Sartre, 1992, p. 345). Distinguishing the other from objects in the world is necessary for Sartre as he upholds Hegel's foundational structure of self-consciousness as emerging in relation with others. For Sartre, one of the "modalities of the Other's presence" is "object-ness," however, the Other must come to exist as a "probable object" and not as a conjectural "dream of an object" in order to achieve individual subjectivity (p. 340). Not only is Sartre concerned with the distinction of Others from objects because he draws on Hegel's model of self-consciousness, it is also critical for Sartre in overcoming the problem of solipsism. Or in other words, the problem of needing to prove the existence of concrete others, to prove it "in some way other than through the knowledge which I have of him" (Sartre, 1992, p. 340). Sartre's discussion of the look draws on Hegel's dialectic of self-consciousness in an effort to overcome solipsism (Frie, 1997). My purpose here is not to examine Sartre's broader project of self-consciousness and intersubjective relations, but to use the tool he provides us in the concept of the look to expose the impact of "being seen" in the disgust encounter. I first turn to an overview of Sartre's theory of the look before considering how it operates in disgust encounters.

For Sartre, the look that is directed at me is what establishes the presence of the other as a subject. This is because "'Being-seen-by-the-Other' is the *truth* of 'seeing-the-

Other'" (original emphasis, Sartre, 1992, p. 345). For Sartre, being seen, or being looked at, is the experience of being an object. I experience myself reduced from a subject to an object for the other because of them looking at me. In other words, the look objectifies me.

Objectification via the look has been a significant concept in social theory, especially as a tool for understanding and analyzing power. It has been especially relevant in analyzing gendered power relations. Simone de Beauvoir (1989) was the first to take up Sartre's idea of the look to analyze gender relations and was significant in its application of the look for examining the operation of power in the context of patriarchal society. The relevance of the look for objectification was also central in Laura Mulvey's (1975) work. Mulvey was the first to introduce the feminist concept of the "male gaze." Mulvey's analysis was situated in film studies and visual arts and consequently, she argued that women were depicted in cinema, art, and literature as passive objects of the active male gaze. The male gaze—marked by masculine ideals and heterosexuality—"projects its fantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly" thereby objectifying women into objects of male desires (Mulvey, 1975, p. 15). The concept of the gaze, however, is applicable to the analysis of power systems more generally. Foucault's (2012) analysis of the "medical gaze" in *Discipline and Punish* examined the operation of power between medical institutions, patients, and society more broadly, especially in relation to processes of diagnosis and treatment. Other notable theories of the gaze include Edward Said's (1978) work on what he refers to as "orientalism" that examines the "post-colonial gaze" in structuring the relationship between colonial powers and colonized countries and peoples. In a somewhat different direction, bell hooks (2003)

highlights the traumatic ways in which the gaze has informed and shaped black identity in the context of slavery and racialized power relations, yet she considers the ways in which the gaze can be a form of "courageous looking," and an act of defiance and resistance to structures of power. Across these accounts however, it is evident that "The gaze is central to systems of power and ideas about knowledge" (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009, p. 106).

Sartre calls the experience of being looked at as a form of "being-for-the-other" because as the object of the other's stare, the other is revealed *as subject*. In Sartre's (1992) words, "I can discover myself in the process of becoming a probable object for only a certain subject" (p. 345). This is in part because "I can not be an object for an object" and so in my objectification through the look of the other, I realize the free subjectivity of the other. What is key in Sartre's theory of the look is that *through* the look the self is discovered. The look of another is "the making-present of the self" to the self (ibid., p. 349); it is the "intermediary which refers me to myself" (ibid., p. 347).

Importantly, Sartre's (1992) theory of the look asks, "What does *being seen* mean for me?" (original emphasis, p. 347). This question gets at the heart of the issue I want to examine in the reframing of the disgust encounter as a meeting of subjects: what does being seen *as disgusting* mean for me? In my interpretation, the experience of objectification, alienation, and unknowability that are invoked by the look in Sartre's theory, align with the experience of being looked at as "disgusting." My intention is not

to comment on the phenomenological experience of this,[54] but to examine the experience of the look when the disgust encounter is understood as a struggle for recognition.

In the disgust encounter, the person who is seen *as* disgusting certainly experiences objectification along the lines of Sartre's discussion. This is especially the effect of repulsion in the disgust experience. The "look" of disgust is engendered through the various manifestations of the repulsed reaction: the furrowed brow, the grimace of the mouth, the pushing out of the tongue as the stomach and throat heave, the flaring of the nostrils, the turning away of the body from an other. These elements make up the "look" of disgust and are intended to distance one subject from another. Most importantly, they are aimed at securing a sense of self in the struggle for recognition. Indeed, for Sartre, intersubjective relations are marked by the desire to achieve self-consciousness through subjugating the other and "making an object" out of them.

Sartre's argument that I discover myself in the objectification that occurs through the look invites the following question: what kind of self is discovered in the look of disgust? This question is trying to reveal the potential impact of a disgust encounter on selfhood. On the one hand, we can speculate and easily imagine that as a "disgusting" object, I discover myself to be "disgusting," to be "repulsive" and "offensive." On the other hand, this question—what kind of self is discovered in the look of disgust from

[54] The writing of Franz Fanon (1952) in *Black Skin, White Masks*, especially his description of riding on a train and encountering a child ("The Lived Experience of the Black Man"), is a poignant example of a phenomenological account of the experience of "being looked at." What is particularly significant in Fanon's analysis in relation to my discussion of Sartre is that Fanon began to see himself through the gaze of the white other. As Fanon (1952) writes, "I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features" (p. 92). I am not suggesting that this experience is the same as being looked at as "disgusting," but mention it here as an example of a phenomenological account that demonstrates Sartre's theory of the look.

another—is not answerable because of the effect of objectification and alienation in the experience of the look. Sartre highlights that even though I am constituted as an object in the look of the other, I am constituted as an object *for* the other, not for myself (Sartre, 1992, p. 367). Consequently, the other "does not serve as a regulative or constitutive concept for the pieces of knowledge which I may have of myself" (ibid.). Therefore, any concrete statements of "knowing" through the other's look (e.g., "I am disgusting" or "I am repulsive to others") will never be more than "fleeting notions whose very nature will be to escape me" (ibid.).

This inability for concrete knowledge is reflective of the alienation that characterizes the experience of being looked at. Alienation arises because "To be looked at is to apprehend oneself as the unknown object of unknowable appraisals" (Sartre, 1992, p. 358). This unknowability is instituted by the other: "The appearance of the Other…causes the appearance in the situation of an aspect which I did not wish, of which I am not master, and which on principle escapes me since it is *for the Other*" (original emphasis, Sartre, 1992, p. 355). This unknowability means that rather than discovering a self that *is* any particular characteristic such as repulsiveness or offensiveness, the look of disgust reveals a self that exists not only "for-myself," but also "for-the-other." The look of disgust makes me conscious "that I have my foundation outside myself. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other" (ibid., p. 349). Indeed, the "self"[55] that

[55] I have placed "self" here in quotation marks to indicate that the intersubjective and relational approach that is at the foundation of my arguments does not uphold a singular, fixed, and absolute "self" that is discovered. Rather, the "self" is dynamic and relational and constructed and reconstructed as an ongoing *process*. From this perspective, the discovering of a "self" that Sartre refers to here is one moment among many discoveries and certainly, what is "discovered" in this moment is not the absolute and static truth of the subject.

is discovered in the look is a *relational* self that I am not the master of. As such, it is an intersubjective self, marked by a foundational relationship to others.

What does the consideration of Sartre's theory of the look mean for an understanding of disgust? It shows that disgust can indeed be understood as an intersubjective relation even when it is considered from the "reverse" position (that of the "disgusting" subject) of what it is usually thought from. It strengthens an understanding of disgust's role in processes of selfhood by highlighting that there are effects on both subjects in the disgust encounter. Furthermore, it gives us a tool to think about disgust as a subject-subject encounter rather than a subject-object encounter and meaningfully engage in a consideration of the "disgusting" subject position. This position can be difficult to think about beyond everyday terms. Our "common" sense tells us that anyone who is named disgusting must feel awful, dejected, rejected, etc. These are inevitably a part of that experience. But how do we understand that experience when we frame it as a struggle for recognition between two active subjects? What does the subject who is named as disgusting do in this encounter? What *can* they do? In a subject-object understanding of disgust, there is no margin of manoeuvrability for that subject because they are an inert and inactive "object." Sartre's theory of the look and theories of recognition give us a tool to think about the "disgusting" subject position and potentially imagine possibilities for action. In Sartre's concept of the look, the possibility for action is provided by the partiality of the look's effect.

Sartre (1992) argues that the look is not absolute. This partiality gestures at another possibility in examining the impact on selfhood for the "disgusting" subject. The experience of repulsion can seem so final and overwhelming. It feels particularly final

when we imagine the effect repulsion has on the subject who has been named disgusting; the metaphorical weight of the label "disgusting" and "repulsive" can seem so immense that it is difficult to perceive how a subject could escape it. Imagining this heavy effect of repulsion, however, only feels final and absolute when disgust is defined as just repulsion. We are returned once again to the gap in disgust research where fascination is unaccounted for. In my view, Sartre's argument that the look is not absolute, along with his claim that the self can refuse to identify with the look cast by the other, provides a conceptual tool for locating the effects of fascination in the disgust encounter.

The partiality of the look derives from Sartre's understanding of intersubjective relations; they are motivated by the desire to make an object out of the other in order to assert my own subjectivity. The effect of a look is therefore not absolute because the one being looked *at* will react to being made an object through the look and in response, attempt to carry out their desire to be a free subjectivity. In being looked at, I can refuse to identify with what the other makes me to be and *cast a look in return*. This look objectifies the other in turn and denies the subjectivity they had asserted by looking at me. Sartre (1992) writes that "In this way I *recover* myself, for I can not be *an object for an object*" (original emphasis, p. 384). In considering disgust, this partiality suggests that the look of repulsion is not conclusive for the "disgusting" subject. The objectification that occurs through the look of another is not totalizing and thereby gestures at the possibility of the "disgusting object" not being left as object, but rather reclaiming subjectivity. I do not mean to suggest, however, that being named "disgusting" is resolved merely by casting a look of disgust back at the other. This would diminish the impact of being named disgusting and seemingly shift the responsibility of resolution

onto the one that has been initially named disgusting. I find this a problematic possibility given its tendency towards a kind of "victim blaming" where we are left with a complimentary relation, as per Benjamin (2018), of "doer" and "done-to." As a result, it translates poorly into an ethical consideration of disgust as it forecloses the possibility of co-constructing a resolution and limits the ways in which subjects can relate to one another.[56] As I will discuss in my case study in the next chapter, such a limited relationship can have profound, life or death consequences.

In Sartre, we also find the idea that casting a look in return does not lead to resolution. The "return" look is *also* not absolute as each subject is motivated by the same intentions: achieve self-consciousness through recognition by an other. Consequently, the intersubjective relation is marked by conflict and struggle as each consciousness attempts to achieve self-consciousness. For Sartre, this struggle is not resolvable and leads to the inevitability of slavery. Mutual recognition is not possible in Sartre's theory; even though there is a continuous reversal of roles between slave and master, the relation is marked by an ongoing effort to negate the other (Frie, 1997). The parallels to Hegel's master slave dialectic are evident.[57] In the master slave dialectic, two consciousnesses clash as they

[56] This aspect of Sartre's concept of the look becomes problematic even further when trying to apply it to an analysis of structural power dynamics and oppression. In other words, being the one who *casts a look* versus being the one *being-looked-at* are not determined simply by the directionality of the look, but are shaped by the power dynamics of race, class, gender, sexuality, to name a few. Consequently, the analysis is more complex than what the opposition between *looking* and *being-looked-at* suggests.

[57] For a detailed consideration of the differences between Sartre and Hegel on the question of intersubjectivity and self-consciousness, see Frie (1997), *Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity in Modern Philosophy and Psychology*, in particular chapter two, "Jean-Paul Sartre: Reconstructing the Subject."

both seek recognition from the other without having to give recognition in return. This leads to the life or death struggle in these encounters.[58]

In this section, I have considered the effect of disgust on a subject who has been named "disgusting." This consideration is necessary given the reframing of disgust as a meeting of two active subjects and an encounter in which the struggle for recognition occurs. Sartre's theory of the look provided a useful conceptual tool to consider the subject position of the "disgusting" and question what impact the look of disgust had on the process of selfhood. However, Sartre, like Hegel, leaves us immobile by only providing two options: be recognized or be the one recognizing. We are reminded of Jessica Benjamin's arguments about "twoness" that is a hallmark of a complementary relation between self and other. In a relation of "twoness," there is only room for the reality of one of the subjects. Even after considering the position of the "disgusting" subject using Sartre, we are still at the impasse of "twoness" where there are no possibilities for co-constructing reality or for recognizing the other as a subject with a separate and equal centre of feeling and experience. Sartre's theory of the look does give us the conceptual tool to imagine an *active* "disgusting" subject, but it does not give us the ability to imagine sustaining subjectivity *without* negating the subjectivity of the other. For this we need to return to Benjamin's theory of recognition and her arguments for the possibility of mutual recognition, especially in the face of breakdown. I will now turn to consider Benjamin's arguments about the centrality of tension and breakdown for

[58] In the next stage of Hegel's (1998) dialectic, the master and slave overcome this negation.

processes of recognition and what this could mean for understanding the paradox of fascination and repulsion.

Breakdown and failure in disgust encounters and possibilities for repair

Thus far, I have considered the effects of repulsion and fascination in disgust and examined how they impact processes of selfhood based on a model of recognition. These effects have become visible through Benjamin's "lens" of recognition. The usefulness of Benjamin's work however, is most apparent in trying to understand the *relationship* between repulsion and fascination. My discussion has tried to show that this relationship influences processes of selfhood by being one affective moment in which the struggle for recognition plays out. In many respects however, this discussion has imagined repulsion and fascination as opposite alternatives. In Benjamin's (1988) words, we can only "play one side at a time" (p. 63). Benjamin's argument for the centrality of breakdown and the possibility of repair is one approach to challenge this configuration and to conceive of fascination and repulsion as existing alongside one another, *as tension*, rather than as opposite and polarized. In Benjamin's critique of Hegel, she questions whether the tension between independence and dependence must break down and whether repair is possible. We are faced with a similar question regarding disgust: *must* the struggle between repulsion and fascination always result in an irreparable relation of domination and separation from the other? Is there a way to feel repulsed *and* fascinated with the other and establish a relationship with this other? Benjamin (2006) writes that this question—of how to achieve relationship to the other as a separate yet connected being—is a significantly difficult question developmentally, clinically, and socially (p. 116).

Benjamin's exploration of this difficulty is through the primacy of breakdown and the possibility for mutual recognition.

Accounting for breakdown is necessary to address the possibility of violence and aggression in disgust encounters. I have highlighted that the possibility of violence in disgust encounters is because selfhood is called into question. If our sense of self is called into question, then the primary "coordinate," or concept for making sense of our own experiences, feelings, actions becomes uncertain; these are significant stakes. Consequently, when selfhood feels at risk in a disgust encounter, it can lead to violent actions and harm to others as the subject who feels threatened attempts to remove the "threat" by whatever means are seemingly necessary. By understanding the disgust encounter as a struggle for recognition, we can see that the relation between self and other becomes "stressed by the existence of individuals' competing needs to be both dependent and independent, to receive recognition each from the other" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 121). This stress is often resolved by a "breakdown" into a complementary relationship where domination supplants mutual recognition. Indeed, Benjamin (2006) emphasizes that, "The two-way structure is indeed fragile, highlighting its susceptibility to a kind of breakdown in which the pattern of "doer and done to" predominates" (p. 119). Benjamin's interpretation of recognition, however, does not just state that breakdown happens and that marks the end. She conceives of breakdown as central to intersubjective relations and this gestures at the possibility of not only understanding why violence can occur in disgust encounters, but suggests that something else could come afterwards.

In other words, what Benjamin's interpretation of recognition offers is the possibility that breakdown of recognition is not the final or inevitable conclusion; there is

space for reconstruction and repair (Benjamin, 1988, 1990, 2006). In fact, Benjamin (1988) locates a "sufficient ground for optimism" in that "if breakdown is "built into" the psychic system, so is the possibility of renewing tension" (p. 223). The same possibility applies to understanding disgust. If breakdown is central to the experience of disgust, *but not the final or only outcome*, then there is the possibility of accounting and repairing the relation between subjects that meet in a disgust encounter. Significantly, this possibility of repair is one that accounts for the fact that selfhood is "at stake." In doing so, it can suggest repairing in ways that acknowledge the felt experience of the struggle for recognition: the feeling and embodied experience of repulsion and fascination.

This brings us to the ethical question of disgust. By reframing disgust as a meeting between two active subjects in which both breakdown and repair are possible, we are invited to ask what this encounter could look like, especially in the push and pull of repulsion and fascination. I turn to this question in the next section.

The Ethical Implications of Reframing Disgust through the Lens of Recognition

The question of recognition and ethics is complex and therefore is the focus of much philosophical debate and discussion.[59] It is beyond my scope here to enter these broader debates; however, the ethical question of disgust is significant and becomes particularly evident when the disgust encounter is reframed as a meeting of subjects. The focus of my discussion is not to give a complete account of the ethical questions raised by disgust, but

[59] In particular, refer to the work of Kelly Oliver (2001), *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* and Paul Ricoeur (2005), *The Course of Recognition*.

rather to highlight how the range of ethical questions has broadened with the approach to disgust I have taken. In other words, my focus is to suggest that reframing disgust as an intersubjective experience changes and broadens some of the questions we are *able* to ask in relation to the ethical question of disgust.

By situating disgust as relevant to processes of selfhood, it also situates disgust as relevant to "world-making." As the discussion showed in chapter one, the inside-out model of disgust understood disgust encounters to be a subject responding to an already present, already made world. In this model, disgust does not play a constitutive role in shaping interpersonal, social, or political relations as it is a form of inner response to a separate and external world. Consequently, the full extent of disgust's ethical implications cannot be accounted for as its social and public dimensions are obscured.

On the other hand, the intersubjective model of selfhood does not separate the emergence and sustenance of selfhood from others and the world; they are ongoingly co-constituted in relationship with one another. If disgust is a part of these processes as I have tried to argue thus far, then disgust is relevant to world-making; disgust shapes and participates in the way the world looks socially, politically, legally, economically, and so on. In this view, the ethical implications expand significantly. If disgust is not operating at a personal, intrapsychic, and private level, but rather *between* subjects intersubjectively, and between subjects and the world, then the question that follows is, "how ought I to treat another?" This question becomes pointedly more complicated when we consider disgust: "how ought I to treat another when they disgust me?" Furthermore, if disgust is active in the formation of both a sense of self and of *world*, then the ethical question of disgust is not just about singular personal moments (i.e., how ought I to treat

this one other person in this moment?), but about collective and social responsibilities: in short, world-making.

It is tempting to want to answer the ethical questions of disgust only from the perspective of repulsion, however, given that I am trying to “anchor” fascination as an equally legitimate element of the disgust experience, my aim here is to try to answer this question while considering *both* repulsion and fascination. I once again invoke Jessica Benjamin’s work to try and hold repulsion and fascination in tension as I explore how one might indeed treat an other when they are disgusted by them. In this section, I will question whether Benjamin’s concept of “the third” or “thirdness” can be applied to disgust to explore something beyond the “twoness” of repulsion and fascination. I suggest that the understanding of disgust requires a practice of “thirdness” at two different levels. The first is a practice of thirdness in how disgust is *theorized*. Theories of disgust must acknowledge the work of both repulsion and fascination in selfhood, world-making, and the possibilities for separation and attunement disgust presents. The second level is an enactment of thirdness by practicing “witnessing” in disgust encounters, especially to the harm it can and does cause to all subjects involved.

One of Benjamin’s (2006) primary concerns is how we can develop the capacities needed for co-creating relational systems of mutual recognition. In particular, she is interested in how to restore recognition after a breakdown. Consequently, her approach to recognition emphasizes breakdowns, but equally emphasizes the potential for acknowledging and repairing them. This potential is founded in the intersubjective concept of the third. Benjamin (2006) sees the commitment to developing “thirdness” as an ethical one. This “…ethical commitment to an acknowledgment process functions as

the point of orientation, or moral third" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 143 fn.2). As a point of orientation, the moral third orients us to acknowledging our responsibility for destructiveness and damage. Benjamin (2006) emphasized that it is not just acknowledging *our own* responsibility or capacity *for* damage, but an acknowledgement that damage *exists* and is experienced by others. Acknowledgement is significant because it initiates the emotional basis for reconciliation or repair after breakdown (Benjamin, 2006, p. 138). She defines acknowledgment as "expressed insight into one's own responsibility" (Benjamin, 2006) as well as "the act of dignifying and validating others' suffering with our attention" (Benjamin, 2015, p. 16). This is primarily a form of self-knowledge and is "too often" taken to be the same as an admission of blame.

Meeting the ethical demands of disgust: Acknowledgement, responsibility, and agency

Acknowledging responsibility is critical for a sense of agency. Benjamin highlights how in a relational structure of "twoness," or a structure of complementarity, the relationship is experienced as Hegel's life or death struggle: control the other (domination) or be controlled (submission). This limits the possibilities for agency or action and can lead to a sense of "helpless awareness of something we cannot control, rather than a sense of responsibility or agency" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 122). Benjamin (2006) uses the following analogy to highlight the experience of "twoness" as it relates to agency:

> A person might feel as if in a vehicle moving toward a collision with no steering wheel or brakes, yet with no sense of felt danger, or no belief in the existence of other cars—that is to say, of other people who can be damaged." (emphasis added, p. 122)

In my view, this analogy fits the experience of disgust quite well. Disgust can make us feel helpless given that it "imposes itself upon us" (W. I. Miller, 1997, p. x), along with the feeling that we are headed toward a collision. The "collision" that disgust alludes to is the "collision" of selfhood where the struggle between independence and dependence comes to a head. In this analogy, creating thirdness, or acknowledging one's responsibility would be equivalent to realizing the presence of other cars on the road, with other drivers and passengers in the cars. This acknowledgement then leads to placing one's hands on the wheel as the *relationship* between "my" car and "other" cars becomes evident. My car can damage other cars and consequently, my actions begin to *matter* for all cars, not just my own. I have now begun to experience myself and others as "agents helping to shape a co-created reality" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 123). This is a critical element for Benjamin's understanding of recognition: addressing "how we register and make meaning of others' impact on us as well as the impact we have on others" (2011, p. 207). Acknowledging this impact can allow action around something that has previously been "paralyzed" by fear and threat (ibid.).

A similar paralysis can take place in the disgust encounter. As my previous discussions have highlighted, understanding disgust as a struggle for recognition reveals that selfhood is at stake. Without a consideration of "thirdness," this threat to the self can result in a structure of a "me" versus "you." There are limited options for action in such a dynamic because there is only room for one of us to "live." Benjamin's (2015) concept of the third, the moral third especially, is that "everyone can live" and that "all deserve to live" (p. 17). This is the ethical question in disgust that becomes evident when disgust is understood as a struggle for recognition. The question is not whether repulsion or

fascination is stronger or more “true” to the disgust experience and therefore whether it is appropriate as a moral guide; the question is whether the subjects in the disgust encounter can both live as subjects *in* and *after* the encounter. In a structure of complementarity—which the disgust encounter falls into repeatedly, both in theory and experience—only one subject can live. This is why there is need for something else, a third term, a way to move beyond the limited options of be recognized (dominance) or be the one recognizing (submission).

Thirdness introduces a relation between self and other that is significantly different from a structure of complementarity in which there are seemingly only two options for action: resist or submit to the other. Benjamin (2006) argues that in contrast, “submitting” to the third, rather than *to the other* (which is what a relation of complementarity can be experienced as) allows us to respect the other’s agency and to “let go of the absolute position of self-assertion” (p. 122). “Submitting” to the third in other words, is surrendering to the “imperatives of participating in a two-way interaction” (ibid., p. 136). *This* form of submission allows conflict to be observed, processed and mediated and consequently offers possibilities beyond resisting or submitting to the other (Benjamin, 2006).

In response to critiques of her understanding of the third,[60] Benjamin (2006) emphasizes that her concept of the third is not based solely on, or equated to, an idea of harmony; the third is based on experiences of surviving destruction, or disharmony.

[60] See Judith Butler’s (2000) piece, “Longing for Recognition,” as well as her chapter, “Contingent Foundations” in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (Benhabib, 1995).

Benjamin (2006) argues that "…the point here is not that human social life is harmonious, but merely that the *third*, insofar as it develops, is founded on the moments in which attunement works" (p. 143, fn. 2). The third is then equally about destruction and harmony. As such, the position of the third is fragile and hard to maintain (Benjamin, 2015). This fragility means that the third position is *continually* forged: "this expansion of thirdness entails not a one-time transformation, but a process: repeated experiences of rupture and challenge followed by the negotiation of some version of shared understanding" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 140). The model of breakdown and repair that Benjamin provides through her concept of thirdness is a more viable and realistic approach to human relationships. Its strength comes from its ability to make space for the role of both destruction and connection, without prioritizing one over the other. It does not romanticize harmony as a utopian ideal that can be reached once and for all once the correct method is identified and utilized. Rather, it understands the tension and interplay of harmony and destruction as it is founded on a model of selfhood that acknowledges the human capacity for violence and care, destruction and repair.

To move towards a more comprehensive understanding of disgust, this is precisely the kind of model that is needed to understand the possibilities for both destruction and attunement in the disgust experience. To consider Benjamin's concept of thirdness in the disgust experience validates the effects of both repulsion and fascination. Furthermore, it acknowledges the real acts of harm that disgust can motivate. This acknowledgment is then the basis for a realistic concept of repair, one which is not founded on the idealization of harmony, but rather acknowledges the complexity of intersubjective relations.

In considering disgust encounters, we are invited to ask whether there are possibilities for creating the third, or thirdness. To answer this question, we must consider whether there are possibilities for *attunement* with the other in the disgust encounter, given the centrality of attunement to Benjamin's understanding of thirdness. The experience of fascination in disgust gestures at this possibility. I am not arguing that fascination equals attunement or the possibility of a harmonious resolution of disgust encounters. However, I do maintain that the experience of fascination in disgust signals at the possibility of acknowledging that an other exists; there is an other who impacts me and has an effect on me. This interest in the other is precisely one of the foundations of creating thirdness. Benjamin (2015) argues that an interest in other minds is what is needed to move beyond *self*-interest towards identification with the other. This movement beyond the self is exactly what fascination gestures at in its pull beyond the self. In my view, this signals that thirdness is possible in disgust encounters, both as a mental, psychological experience and as a social experience. The possibility of thirdness is significant for meeting the ethical demands of disgust.

Witnesses: Creating thirdness

The question of how to "create" or engage in a process of thirdness is not an easy one. Benjamin's understanding of how to create thirdness is heavily rooted in the analyst-patient dynamic. Exploring how it translates into other relations is a complex question, one which she herself acknowledges as difficult and that she has begun to engage through

her more recent work with groups in Tel Aviv and Gaza.[61] I would like to raise one consideration that has come forth in Benjamin's work with Israeli and Palestinian affairs as I think it is particularly useful and practical for addressing the ethical question in disgust. This is Benjamin's use of the "moral witness" to uphold the space of the moral third. I recognize that the concept of "witnessing" is accompanied by a diverse and rich body of literature and research. My discussion here will focus on Benjamin's understanding of witnessing given that she takes it up in relation to "thirdness" specifically. My concern is the usefulness of "thirdness" for understanding and practicing disgust and in order to assess this, "witnessing" is a necessary concept.

Benjamin specifically draws on the work of Chana Ullman (2011) and Avishai Margalit (2004) in her discussion of witnessing as it relates to the moral third. Benjamin (2015) proposed that the moral third's central idea—that everyone can live—must be upheld by witnesses. These witnesses uphold the moral third through acknowledgement of violations and injustices that happen to all kinds of victims. The demand that witnessing acknowledge *all* victims is precisely to break the complementary structure of relations in which only one subject can "live." Without an acknowledgement of all victims, the outcome will be a mere reversal of positions between oppressor and oppressed, which "has all too often been the prescription that reproduces the disease" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 135). Importantly, Benjamin (2015) highlights that witnessing is not a substitute for political change, however, it creates the conditions where such change is

[61] See Jessica Benjamin (2011a), "Acknowledgement of Collective Trauma in Light of dissociation and Dehumanization" and "Acknowledging the Other's Suffering: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Trauma in Israel/Palestine" (2015).

possible. Witnessing makes this possible because it raises awareness of human interdependence and the shared responsibility we carry for others (Benjamin, 2015).

Witnessing is related to Benjamin's moral third in its ability to reinstate lawfulness. Witnessing, by acknowledging the suffering and pain of all parties involved, affirms the third, which then validates the "lawfulness" of the world or the "lawful world" (Benjamin, 2015, p. 208). Validating the lawfulness of the world is necessary when violations and ruptures have occurred as it reinstates the value placed on the law (ibid.). Benjamin highlights that *what* defines the lawful world is the "effort to recognize ruptures, to repair when possible, and to acknowledge failure and harm when impossible" (ibid.). Central to reinstating lawfulness is overcoming denial. This brings me to the first level at which a practice of thirdness is necessary for understanding disgust: to bear witness as an approach to answering disgust's ethical question.

Witnessing in theories of disgust

Overcoming denial is one of the most difficult elements of the witness's work. Witnesses undertake risk, but as Benjamin (2011) emphasizes, this is often the risk that accompanies naming uncomfortable truths that are otherwise denied (p. 209). As such, witnessing *denial*, both in the community, in relationships, and in the witnesses themselves, becomes critical for the witnesses to uphold the moral third (ibid.). What strikes me is that Benjamin (2011) writes that the denial or dissociation of what is unbearable may lead to appealing to "simple moral categories" that actually undermine thirdness. This is striking for me because in my understanding, this has been the primary approach to addressing the ethical question of disgust. Debates around disgust's

“morality” or appropriateness for guiding moral, legal, and social practices has been focused on deciding whether it *is* or *is not* valuable. These discussions have overlooked or forgotten the *experience* of disgust; they have removed themselves from the fact that disgust *happens*, and that “they”—as authors, researchers, theorists—are at times, disgusted by other human beings and that they too, can cause harm as a result. Disgust debates have become debates about abstract “oughts” and have consequently failed to witness the violations and harm that disgust can engender. This failure equates to a stunted account of the range of disgust’s ethical implications, as well as inadequate answers to its ethical questions. The ethical question of disgust should begin with a practice in our theory of what Benjamin argues for in witnessing as thirdness: acknowledgment of failure and loss, of pain and suffering, and of *our* capacity to cause harm to the other when we experience disgust. To bear witness in our theorizing will allow us to move towards answering the ethical question of “how ought I to treat the other when they disgust me?” in realistic and sustainable ways that do not forget the visceral pushes and pulls of disgust.

“Theory as Witness”: Witnessing in the practice of disgust

I would like to suggest, and accordingly attempt in the next chapter, that our theorizing of disgust must then serve *as* a witness so that the practice of disgust can begin to shift. Theories of disgust can serve as a public acknowledgement of the injury and injustice that disgust can engender. Certainly, current theories do this in part; the debates around disgust’s “morality” and ethical implications are indicative of a recognition that disgust can cause harm to others. As I discussed in the previous section however, this witnessing has been incomplete as it has been founded in part on denial: denial of our own

experiences of disgust and capacities for harm. However, theories of disgust can also serve as witness to disgust's implications for selfhood by acknowledging that both the push of repulsion and the pull of fascination are significant. Without witnessing all of these elements in the disgust encounter, we are left with a poor understanding of how others impact us, and we impact them. Perhaps most critically, we are unable to imagine the possibilities for thought and action that fascination affords in its pull beyond self-interest, in its pull *towards* others. This pull towards others is so critical for understanding disgust as it reveals the ethical stakes involved (in other words, there are other subjects, not objects, involved in this encounter) and allows us to begin imagining actions and interactions not guided by the logic of dominance and submission.

"Theory as witness" is not an abstract or idealistic suggestion. As I suggested in chapter two, the terms of description that are made available through institutional practices are significant for and constitutive of self-experience and for making sense of our experiences in the world. Therefore, the forms of visibility that theories of disgust provide are significant. Traditional theories of disgust have given substantial visibility to repulsion in the disgust experience and little to fascination. As such, they have overlooked disgust's implication for processes of selfhood. Namely, they have overlooked disgust's *relational* elements and consequently have been unable to account for the full ethical implications of disgust. A more complete account of disgust initiated by a commitment to "witnessing" *in* our theorizing would allow the theory to then *be* witness in the world. This "being" witness would accordingly engender different ways of practicing and experiencing disgust as it would center on the critical question, "how ought I to treat the other when they disgust me?" What may at first seem like small

conceptual shifts are actually the shifts that make it possible to imagine, mobilize, and practice different ways of being a subject in the world. These shifts represent changes in the terms of description that are available for persons to take up, act on, and use to make meaning of their experiences of self, of the world, and of others.

In the following chapter, I will attempt to enact “theory as witness” by turning to a case study. In my discussion of this case study, I hope to bear witness to disgust’s role in selfhood, to the work of repulsion and fascination, and to the ethical stakes that operate at the centre of this work.

Chapter 4.

The Work of Disgust: The Ashley Smith Case

> *When a history is not over, the arm comes up…We can just say, here, hear: the wayward arm in this grim story is speaking to us. She is trying to speak to us. She has something to say to us. Listen. (Ahmed, 2017, pp. 80–81)*[62]

Disgust's impact on how we come to understand ourselves, others, and the world is not merely a theoretical or abstract phenomenon. Disgust's work is locatable in real, lived experiences and situations. In this chapter, I demonstrate disgust's work by analysing disgust encounters in the circumstances surrounding Ashley Smith's incarceration and death. The story of Ashley Smith's death is a difficult one to tell.[63] Ashley Smith died on October 19, 2007 at the age of 19 while serving a prison sentence at the Grand Valley Institution for Women (GVI-W), in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. Ashley died by self-inflicted ligature strangulation while correctional officers stood outside her cell door and watched. The officers had been ordered by management not to enter her cell as long as

[62] Thank you to my feminist reading group for taking on Sara Ahmed's (2017) *Living a Feminist Life* that included the Grimm's fairy tale about "The Willful Child." The tale tells of a willful child who "would not do as her mother wished" and consequently "God had no pleasure in her." The willful child died, yet she kept appearing; even from the grave, she would reappear as her arm would repeatedly "stretch upwards" from the soil. The reading group conversations were insightful, challenging, and energizing and have shaped my approach to Ashley's case. The "arm" of that discussion lives on in this chapter.

[63] I am intentionally calling this the story of Ashley's *death* as I want to highlight that the events that took place during Ashley's incarceration do not equate to being her life. Her time in incarceration did make up a significant portion of her life *time*, but the descriptions, reports, and analyzes about Ashley do not represent nor capture her life in its entirety. As with any "case study" that has a human being as its focus, I tread gently with the knowledge that Ashley was a living, feeling being with people that cared for her; my analytical approach and language in this discussion are never intended to diminish the complexity of Ashley's life, most of which we will never know.

she was breathing; however, in this instance, officers intervened too late and Ashley died. In December of 2013, after an 11-month inquest, a Coroner's jury in Ontario ruled Ashley's death a homicide. Ashley Smith's death and experiences in the Canadian correctional system became of interest for both provincial and federal authorities; it led to independent investigations and reports being published by The Correctional Investigator of Canada, Howard Sapers (2008), and the Ombudsman and Child and Youth Advocate of New Brunswick, Bernard Richard (2008), as well as the Ontario Coroner's inquest (Carlisle, 2013). Furthermore, the Coroner's jury recommended that Smith's death be used as a case study for all existing and future Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) staff and management (Carlisle, 2013).

Disgust's significance in these encounters and in Ashley's death becomes evident when we analyze the disgust encounters from a relational framework via Benjamin, and from the perspective that these encounters were relevant to processes of selfhood and meaning-making. The strength of my case analysis does not come from there being a perfect alignment with the theories I have been proposing and discussing; the strength comes from the moments of "contact" between Ashley's case and the discussion so far. These moments of contact provide new perspectives and interpretations of both Ashley's death and of disgust encounters and allow us to see disgust "at work" in ways that may not be possible in a purely conceptual discussion or in traditional understandings of disgust.

My reason for examining Ashley's time in prison and consequent death is because of the visibility of disgust encounters in the circumstances leading to her death. Disgust encounters were especially visible in this case because of the institutional procedures that

are in place in a prison setting, such as the requirement to document "disruptive" incidents, record behavioural observations of inmates, and make daily logs of general prison activities. Consequently, there is written documentation of disgust encounters in Ashley's case, meaning that there is access to "disgust stories." Furthermore, the prison setting means that there is documentation of these encounters over a *sustained* period of time, thereby allowing for an analysis of broader dynamics and factors that could have shaped these disgust encounters. This kind of sustained documentation is not as readily available in other institutional case studies. It is especially difficult to find this form of visibility in school-based case studies as teachers do not make written records of all classroom activities, nor do they note every "disruptive" incident that they intervene in, disgusting or not. Even when cases of school based "disgust encounters" do make it into the public records, it is often a report on a one-time incident that provides limited details due to the requirement to protect under-age students. For example, in 2007 a principal at a Toronto elementary school was suspended for throwing excrement at a child (Small, 2007). Details beyond this are not available to the public given a provincial court ban on publishing the names of the victims and reporting the details of the incident ("Principal won't face," 2007; "Toronto principal pleads," 2007). It is therefore difficult to examine these disgust encounters in a meaningful way, especially in a way that allows for a *relational* examination of disgust.

The visibility of disgust encounters in Ashley's case brings clarity, more so than most other cases, to the relational aspects of disgust and to the ways that disgust encounters shape processes of selfhood and intersubjective relations. As I have been arguing, my aim in this research is to expose and examine the effects of disgust on

subjects, especially the ways in which disgust encounters impact a sense of self and one's relationship to others and the world. In doing so, I hope to emphasize the ethical stakes of disgust encounters. Examining disgust encounters within the context of Ashley's imprisonment and death indicates what repulsion and fascination signify when disgust is configured as a meeting of two subjects, rather than a meeting between a disgusted subject and a disgusting object. Though Ashley's case is limited to a specific setting, the institutional aspects of the case are relevant to a consideration of institutional practices more generally, including educational institutions. As my discussion in chapter two highlighted, educational research has been slow to examine emotions in the context of classrooms and institutional policies and practices; it is therefore my view that my examination of disgust encounters in one type of institution is applicable for expanding and clarifying our understanding of disgust as it appears in institutional settings more widely.

The conditions that resulted in Ashley's death are complex. My analysis is not intended to comprehensively account for Ashley's death, but to contribute to an understanding of what happened by considering the conditions leading to her death. I will examine a small portion of these conditions and analyze them from the lens of disgust and Benjamin's theory of recognition that I discussed in chapter three. In particular, I will focus on Ashley's "disruptive" behaviours and the institutional responses to these behaviours (i.e., placing Ashley in segregation). To be more specific, I will consider Ashley's mobilization of disgust where she used primary disgusting objects—mainly feces and urine. My argument, in short, is that these disgust encounters, as well as the institutional response to the encounters, were a struggle for recognition. The ethical

implications of the struggle for recognition are made explicit given that this resulted in Ashley's death. Disgust encounters were part of what led to Ashley being housed in solitary confinement, and to the order for COs not to enter her cell, which ultimately led to her death.

As many of the Ashley Smith reports highlight, the conditions and circumstances Ashley faced were not unusual. Unnoticed, yes; unusual, no. As the New Brunswick Child advocate reported, "…it quickly became obvious that [Ashley's] personal experience in the correctional system is like that of other young men and women involved in the youth criminal justice system, experiencing a personal struggle with mental illness and severe behaviour disorders" (Richard, 2008, p. 7). Similarly, Howard Sapers' (2008) report emphasized that Ashley's death was due to failures within the Correctional Services of Canada that had been previously identified and that these failures were not applicable only to Ashley (p. 4). These are all the more reasons to attend to Ashley's death as the conditions that led to it are not unusual. Consequently, Ashley's death may not be the only one that results from these conditions.

Background

Ashley first entered the Canadian criminal justice system at the age of 14, in March of 2002 on charges related to public disturbance, trespass or violence (Richard, 2008). More specifically, Ashley was charged for throwing crab apples at a postman. This was the beginning of a series of incidents, criminal charges, and periods of incarceration in both

the youth and adult custodial systems for Ashley.[64] While incarcerated, Ashley's difficult behaviours continued and both institutional and criminal charges continued to be brought against her during this time. For example, as the New Brunswick ombudsman's report recounts, Ashley was involved in an astounding number of incidents in a three-year period of custody at the New Brunswick Youth Centre (NBYC)—over eight hundred *documented* incidents involving disruptive behaviours, refusal to follow staff orders, and self-harm incidents (Richard, 2008). Similarly, during an 11.5 month period in federal custody, Ashley was involved in 150 security incidents that usually involved self-harming incidents such as self-strangulation, head-banging, and cutting (Sapers, 2008).

The institutional responses to these incidents were predominantly the use of physical force to restrain Ashley, and to send Ashley to isolation, or segregation units. At NBYC, Ashley spent two thirds of her time there in isolation (Richard, 2008). When she began her federal term, she was kept "continuously" on administrative segregation status (Sapers, 2008, p. 5). During her stays at mental health treatment facilities (Correctional Service of Canada's Regional Psychiatric Centre (Prairies Region) and L'Institut Philippe-Pinel de Montreal), she was not on administrative segregation because such a designation did not exist at these facilities; regardless, she was kept isolated from other patients (ibid.). In addition to being assigned segregation status, physical force was used regularly during security incidents involving Ashley. This included the use of restraints, inflammatory spray (i.e., pepper spray), and physical handling (ibid.).

[64] For a comprehensive account of timelines, offences, and charges, see the Correctional Investigator of Canada, Howard Sapers' (2008) report, and the New Brunswick Ombudsman and Child and Youth advocate, Bernard Richard's (2008) report on Ashley Smith.

As Sapers (2008) notes, the interactions between Ashley and the institution continued to escalate in frequency and force. Ashley engaged in self-harming behaviours on an on-going basis; one report calls it an “unending litany” of incidents (Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (UCCO), 2008, p. 25). These tended to take the form of Ashley tying ligatures around her neck. As these incidents continued, a series of institutional policies were put into place by management regarding staff interventions when it came to Ashley. Notably, staff were directed to refrain from intervening when Ashley was choking herself “as long as [she] was breathing, talking or moving” (ibid., p. 30). It was this precise directive that led to correctional officers not entering Ashley’s cell in time to cut off the ligatures from around her neck.

Among Ashley’s “disruptive behaviours” and “security incidents,” were incidents involving primary disgust objects. More specifically, they involved smearing or throwing feces and urine, and spitting. In my discussion, I refer to these generally as “disgust encounters.” These encounters are consistently mentioned in the investigation reports and are cited as part of the behaviours that led to Ashley being held in segregation and to the order for staff not to enter her cell unless her life was imminently at risk.

A Broader View—Disgust Encounters in Prisons

Before continuing to discuss the particulars of disgust in Ashley’s case, it is useful to highlight that encounters with “disgusting” objects, particularly primary disgusting objects, are common in Canadian prisons. This may be apparent given that prisons often house inmates in close quarters and so encounters with bodily fluids would be common. However, an examination of these specific encounters reveals that they are not arising in

the context of daily hygienic practices (e.g., walking in on someone when they are using the toilet), but rather in the context of confrontations. For example, Justice Louise Arbour's (1996) "Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women" in Kingston, Ontario—the same prison where Ashley died—showed that throwing or splashing urine was a common occurrence in confrontations between inmates and staff.

Research into the working conditions of prisons show the same trends. A study led by Neil Boyd at Simon Fraser University surveyed more than 200 correctional officers (CO) in 2011 to assess the working conditions in British Columbia's correctional facilities. The COs were asked a range of questions regarding their involvement with work place incidents that could be potentially stress-inducing. These included, but were not limited to, incidents involving exposure to and/or contact with bodily fluids (blood, feces, saliva or spit, urine, and vomit), physical assaults, witnessing deaths, overdoses, and being threatened by an inmate.

Boyd's (2011) study found considerably high rates of exposure and direct contact with bodily fluids. More than 90 percent of correctional officers reported that they had been exposed to blood (Boyd, 2011, p. i, 8) and over 75 percent reported being exposed to feces, saliva (spit), and urine (p. i, 8). Close to 40 percent reported that they had been hit by feces, urine, vomit, and saliva in the form of spit (Boyd, 2011, p. i, 9). As a CO recounts, "I have continuously been exposed to all kinds of bodily fluids…Spitting at me – or urine being thrown at me – usually occurs when I open cell doors" (Boyd, 2011, p. 1). In terms of CO perception of stress, being hit by these bodily fluids was perceived to be one of the most stressful incidents among the scenarios surveyed (Boyd, 2011, p. 9). In fact, more than 95 percent found being hit by an inmate's bodily fluids to be

"somewhat or very stressful." What is particularly striking is that this assessment was higher than the stress perceived when observing the suicide or homicide of an inmate.

Encounters with primary disgusting objects are not isolated incidents in the Ashley Smith case, rather they represent a more common prison phenomenon. I recognize that we cannot generalize from a study that was undertaken only with COs in British Columbia, however, the study is one of the best to my knowledge that captures the first-hand accounts of Canadian COs having to deal with "disgusting" objects. This is particularly pertinent given that the CO reports in the Ashley Smith case have not been released to the public (Stone, 2014). Nevertheless, several of the reports that resulted from investigations into Ashley's death detail disgust encounters; I turn to these in the next section.

Disgust Encounters in the Ashley Smith reports

I have been arguing for disgust to be understood relationally and as relevant to processes of selfhood, world-making, and ethics. In applying this framing of disgust to the disgust encounters that took place between Ashley and the institution, disgust's work in processes of selfhood becomes evident, as do the ethical implications of disgust encounters. I do not claim that these encounters were what led to Ashley's death in a linear or clear manner, nor do I claim that they were *the* cause of her death. However, disgust encounters appear much more significant when understood relationally as they contributed to the escalation of behaviours by both Ashley and the institution. It is particularly striking that even though CO reports have not been released, the reports that do exist, such as the union report and the Correctional investigator's report, consistently

mention disgust encounters—throwing feces, threatening to throw urine, and spitting. The disgust encounters mentioned in the inquest reports establish a picture of what interactions were like between Ashley and staff and give a sense of the interactions that led to the order for staff not to enter her cell as long as she was breathing.

The report on Ashley's death by the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (2008) includes the details of numerous disgust encounters between Ashley and staff. The report details Ashley throwing toilet water that contained urine and feces, spitting, and smearing the cell camera, window, and food slot with faecal matter (UCCO, 2008, pp. 18–22). The Union report states that observational reports detailing these kinds of incidents were "produced on almost a daily basis for [a period of] two weeks" before Ashley's death (ibid., p. 26). The import of these behaviours is demonstrated by the fact that management at Nova Institution installed plexiglass on the outside of Ashley's segregation cell to prevent staff contact with bodily fluids (ibid., p. 24).

In one instance, these kinds of behaviours, or disgust encounters, led to criminal charges. In June of 2004, during her time at NBYC, Ashley smeared feces throughout her Therapeutic Quiet (TQ) cell.[65] In doing so, she covered the window in feces, which meant that supervision checks could not be carried out. When Ashley became "non-compliant" with staff and tried to leave the cell, staff physically restrained Ashley, and later placed her in a body belt restraint and searched her. This incident led to Ashley

[65] Therapeutic Quiet (TQ) cells are very similar to segregation or isolation units. They are cells located away from other units, may be monitored by video surveillance, and have a small window and food slot (Richard, 2008, p. 18). As Richard writes, inmates refer to TQ as "the hole" (ibid.).

being charged with causing damage to property.[66] Ashley was found guilty and sentenced to stay in TQ (Richard, 2008, p. 22).

Another incident involving unidentified fluids also led to extensive force being used against Ashley, though no charges were laid. During her time at the Saint John Regional Correctional Centre, Ashley was tasered when she was found standing on her bed, holding two cups of "unidentified liquid substance." Given previous reports detailing similar instances and the fact that Ashley had limited access to frankly anything at all, it seems likely that the unidentified liquid was urine. A Correctional Officer "barged into her cell," and hit her with a shield. Four officers restrained Ashley, while a fifth CO tasered Ashley (Richard, 2008, p. 28). This incident raises the question as to whether the reaction to Ashley would have been different had the liquid been identified as water. Would a young girl, standing on her bed holding a cup of water been threatening enough to warrant physical restraining, the use of force (hitting with a shield), and the use of a taser gun? It is, of course, purely speculation, but it raises the question as to what exactly triggered the reaction of force and violence in this incident.

The above two incidents demonstrate the threat that disgust encounters can signal. Criminal charges and being tasered are certainly strong reactions to disgust objects and represent some of the more extreme reactions possible. Disgust encounters, alongside Ashley's self-harm behaviours and suicide attempts, led to increases in security-focused measures as responses to Ashley. As we will see in the next section where I examine the

[66] She was charged under subsection 12 (1)(*b*) of Regulation 92-71 of the *Custody and Detention of Young Persons Act.*

institutional responses more specifically, the security-focused measures increased Ashley’s disruptive behaviours. As time went on, this cycle led to staff fatigue, including staff indicating that they were becoming more and more uncertain of when to intervene in these situations (Sapers, 2008). As one former CO recounts, “She wore everyone down” (Moore, 2008). The uncertainty continued to escalate when front-line staff began to be disciplined for intervening too early during Ashley’s self-strangulation incidents (Sapers, 2008). Similarly, an incident took place where a correctional manager physically held back a staff member from entering Ashley’s cell to provide assistance; this incident contributed to growing staff fatigue and doubt (Sapers, 2008). As Sapers (2008) concludes, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) “Failed to provide an acceptable level of humane professional care and treatment to Ms. Smith while she was in its custody” and it “permitted its administrative needs, its capacity issues, and its perceived security needs to over-ride Ms. Smith’s very real human needs” (p. 19).

It is significant that primary disgusting objects such as feces, urine, and spit are consistently mentioned in the reports alongside threats to kill staff, and alongside “relentless” physical assaults. This suggests that these are encounters that *matter*; they have meaning in creating the encounters and structuring the ways of relating that are possible during these encounters. These ways of relating are relevant to Ashley’s death. I take note especially of the fact that disgust encounters are consistently discussed alongside suicide attempts in the documents. If disgust encounters are understood to be struggles for recognition—struggles for existence as a subject in the world—then the simultaneous discussion of disgust and suicide is comprehensible; existence is at stake in both disgust encounters and in suicide. I will expand on this analysis later in the chapter.

The events that unfolded between Ashley and the CSC are difficult to understand. How might we make sense of them? How do we make sense of the escalation in behaviours from smearing feces, throwing urine, spitting, and biting to tying ligatures around one's neck? How do we understand the institutional response of just increasing the use of force against Ashley? Framing these encounters as struggles for recognition provide one avenue for understanding as it shows the stakes that are being struggled for in these encounters: a sense of self, others, and the world.

Ashley versus the Institution: Disgust Encounters as the Struggle for Recognition

To consider the interactions between Ashley and the institution from the perspective of recognition is not to justify the institutional behaviours and interventions that were taken, but rather to expand an understanding of what happened and why. This understanding is important to prevent such tragic events from happening again, particularly given that the circumstances Ashley faced were not unusual nor rare.

My analysis will look at both "sides" involved in Ashley's death: the institution and Ashley. For brevity, my references to the "institution" encompass all those associated with the disciplinarian, non-prisoner side (correctional officers, management, wardens, the Correctional Service of Canada, and the legal system as an institution).[67] I have identified the institution to be the "disgusted subject" and Ashley as the "'disgusting'

[67] As I discuss later, the relationship between Ashley and the institution dissolved into what Benjamin (2018) calls an "unresolved opposition" (p. 24). This opposition is already evident in the language I am using here. In one sense, this is intentional on my part. In another sense, I struggle to find any other language that is not oppositional in nature to describe the relationship between Ashley and the institution. This can be interpreted as indicative of how easily complimentary relations of "twoness" structure our language and our ways of thinking about intersubjective relations and relationality.

object." Ashley is the "disgusting object" in this analysis, not because she *is* disgusting, but she was the one that was looked at with disgust, *as* disgusting by the institution, because of her use of primary disgusting objects. I turn to the "disgusted subject" first in my reframing of disgust as the struggle for recognition in the case of Ashley's death.

"Disgusted Subject"—The institution

As Benjamin (1998) argues, we have a capacity for identification with others. This capacity can either impede recognition by instituting distance, or further recognition by bridging difference. If distance is instituted, recognition is impeded because we can no longer perceive the other across this distance. This distance can serve to objectify the other—to make them object. As I discussed in chapter three, the work of repulsion in disgust is to push us away from that which disgusts us. It pushes away in embodied, physical ways by instituting actual distance, but also in more intangible ways like refusing to think about concrete others in the world. The "push away" of repulsion in Ashley's case is locatable in the institutional response to Ashley's mobilization of disgust. When Ashley mobilized disgust through smearing feces, splashing urine, and spitting at others, Ashley became the "disgusting object." The metonymic "stickiness" of disgust that Ahmed (2004b) raises is evident here. By "using" disgusting objects, the disgusting properties of these objects "stuck" to Ashley.

Consequently, Ashley was responded to as a disgusting object, not as a subject. The subject-object relationship is most evident in the institutional response to Ashley's behaviours, both in the actual action undertaken—sending Ashley to a segregation unit, continuing to restrict rights and privileges within the segregation unit, and the order not

to enter her cell during self-harm incidents—as well as the security-focused framework motivating these actions.

Segregation as the enactment of a subject-object relationship

Under the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* (*CCRA*), Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) have the authority to enact administrative segregation status in cases where there is evidence that an inmate would present a risk to the safety and security of the institution or of individuals, including staff or other inmates, if housed in the general inmate population. Segregation cells are located away from other cells, are sometimes monitored by video surveillance, have a small opening through which a meal tray can be passed through, and may have a small window (Richard, 2008). The *CCRA* lists conditions for the decision to place or maintain an inmate on administrative segregation status and specifies that segregation should be minimized as much as possible, as it is intended to be a preventive, not punitive measure. Regardless of these conditions, specifications, and limitations, Ashley spent most of her time in custody in segregation or isolation of some form. As Sapers (2008) highlights, “The Correctional Service’s only real consistency in managing Ms. Smith’s behaviour was to maintain her segregation status” (p. 9).

To make matters worse, Ashley’s rights and privileges in segregation continued to be taken away in response to “security” incidents. At the Grand Valley Institution for Women (GVI-W), she only had a smock to wear, no shoes, no mattress to sleep on, and no blanket (Sapers, 2008). Because of continuing “safety” concerns, the tiles from the cell eventually came to be removed from Ashley’s cell, meaning that Ashley slept on bare concrete floor (ibid.). Light fixtures were removed, and food trays were no longer

permitted in her cell (UCCO, 2008). Ashley's toilet paper came to be rationed to only two pieces at a time, she was denied soap, and was not permitted underwear or sufficient sanitary products to meet her needs while menstruating (ibid.; Sapers, 2008). In the weeks leading up to her death, Ashley spent her time dressed in a security suicide gown (intended to reduce suicide attempts), had nothing to occupy her time (not even a piece of paper or a book), and her only interactions with other people (staff) were through the small food slot (Saper, 2008). Sapers' (2008) report called Ashley's administrative segregation status to be a "highly restrictive, and at times, [an] inhumane regime" (p. 6). In response to these conditions, Ashley filed seven formal complaints in August of 2007 (Sapers, 2008). The CSC denied all seven complaints.

In Benjamin's theory of recognition, we can understand these actions to be impeding recognition by restricting the conditions that would allow Ashley to be seen and treated as a "subject." Not only was physical distance instituted by placing her in a segregation cell, but she was treated as if she were an object by denying her basic physical, human needs. As one CO in Neil Boyd's (2011) study recounts, "The inmates are treated like animals, in conditions that I would not be able to tolerate myself" (p. 1). In animal-like conditions, Ashley's humanity, her existence as a subject both at an individual level and at the systemic level, becomes more and more difficult to account for. The security-focused framework that guided the institutional actions (and non-actions) towards Ashley are also indicative of the subject-object relationship between the institution and Ashley.

Security-focused interventions as the enactment of a subject-object relationship

Kelly Hannah-Moffat's (2013) report to the coroner investigating Ashley's death draws on an extensive body of research on self-harm and suicidal behaviours. Though disgust encounters do not directly figure into Hannah-Moffat's report, the report extensively critiques the security-focused interventions that were employed against Ashley during self-harming incidents. These security-focused interventions in self-harm incidents were the same interventions employed during disgust encounters and therefore, Hannah-Moffat's critiques are also applicable in a disgust centered analysis.

In Hannah-Moffat's (2013) report, she argues that security-focused interventions like the use of physical force, segregation, and the use of restraints, have been shown to be decontextualized from self-harm behaviours and their causes. Consequently, they are based on a misunderstanding of self-harm behaviours as "acting out, attention seeking, manipulation, and/or as a potential danger to others" (ibid., p. 4). Security-focused responses can lead to an increase in self-harm behaviours and add to the emotional pain already being experienced (ibid).

Sapers' report (2008) and Hannah-Moffat's report (2013) are both clear in that the security-focused interventions employed with Ashley "escalated her acting out behaviours" and "served to… worsen her condition rather than to assist her" (Sapers, 2008, pp. 5–6). A vicious cycle ensued as Ashley's escalation of disruptive behaviours (both in frequency and severity) lead to more security-focused interventions from the CSC (Saper, 2008, p. 7). GVI-W management "drafted and redrafted" management plans for Ashley, yet the plans were largely "security-focused, lacked mental health

components, and were often devoid of explicit directions for addressing Ms. Smith's on-going self-harming behaviours" (Sapers, 2008, p. 7).

These security-guided interventions also resulted in Ashley being transferred across institutions a staggering number of times: seventeen times in a period of less than a year across and between federal penitentiaries, treatment facilities, and hospitals; an amount that Sapers (2008) calls "beyond comprehension" (p. 14). The reasons cited for these transfers are framed in security language: cell availability, incompatibility with inmates, and staff fatigue (ibid.). As Sapers (2008) highlights, these transfers "had little or nothing to do with Ms. Smith's needs" and consequently, undermined Ms. Smith's trust and therapeutic relationships (p. 5).

As I will argue in the next section, security-focused interventions can be interpreted as operating with a subject-object approach to inmates, behaviours, and conflicts. A subject-object framework is, of course, not the only paradigm at work; security-focused interventions are embedded in a broader social context and discourse around law, crime, and punishment.[68] But a theory of recognition is useful for seeing the subject-object dynamic at work in these security-focused interventions and I consider this next in my discussion.

[68] For a consideration of some of these discourses, particularly as they pertain to the death penalty and solitary confinement, see the edited collection, "Legal Violence and The Limits of the Law" (Nichols & Swiffen, 2017).

Making sense of the institutional reactions—No longer perceiving the other

The institutional reaction to Ashley's behaviours can be understood in a recognition framework when we consider the paradoxical nature of the relationship between self and other that Benjamin brings to the forefront in her work. The relationship between self and other is paradoxical because the self must attempt to establish themselves as absolute and independent through a relationship to the other, which denotes dependence. This results in a struggle for control—a push pull between asserting the self and needing the other. This struggle is particularly salient in examining the events leading to Ashley's death, especially for making sense of the institutional reaction to segregate Ashley. Benjamin (1988) highlights that the struggle for recognition can result in the other resisting to recognize the acts of the other so as to "preserve his identity" (p. 32). This resistance takes the form of rejecting any sign that the acts of the other have an effect. In other words, ""Nothing you do or say can affect me, I am who I am"" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 32).

Sending Ashley to a segregation cell is an attempt to communicate this precise message: "Nothing you do or say can affect me"—even if you throw urine at me, smear the walls with feces, or even if you have a ligature around your neck and are dying in front of my eyes—you cannot affect me. Why would the institution wish to send this message to Ashley? The final moments of Ashley's life and the actions taken (and not taken) while she suffocated to death under the gaze of others seem incomprehensible. However, if the circumstances leading up to Ashley's death and the event of her death are framed as struggles for recognition, then it becomes clearer how the institutional position not to intervene, to not react, came to be. They came to be because they were responses to a life and death struggle for recognition in which there were seemingly only two options:

submit to the other or dominate the other (Benjamin, 1998). Benjamin (2009, 2018) refers to this polarization as a structure of "split complementarity" or "twoness" as there are only two options: doer and done-to, accuser and accused, good and bad, and so on. We can witness this "twoness" at work in Ashley's case in an acute way: jailer and prisoner, free and imprisoned, accuser and accused. This structure is significant for the ways in which self and other can relate to one another. In a structure of twoness, it is only possible to submit to the demands of the other or resist them (Benjamin, 2018). This establishes a relationship of subject-object, rather than subject and subject; there is no space or possibility for *both* to exist as subjects given the paradoxical nature of self and other.

Recognition is therefore about existence: "If I completely control the other, then I cease to exist, and if the other completely controls me, then I cease to exist" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 53). In a penal setting, this existence can represent numerous and intertwined existences: the individual institution, the authority of the institution's management, as well as broader social "existences" such as the force of law, the social imperative to punish and reform, and so forth. Consequently, what was at stake in the struggles for recognition between Ashley and "the institution" were far-reaching. The institutional response of sending Ashley to segregation, to only interacting with her through a food slot, denying and limiting her basic hygienic supplies is precisely a relationship of twoness as Benjamin describes. It objectified Ashley to establish the institution as an independent and autonomous subject.

The disgust encounters between Ashley and COs were therefore affective moments for the struggle for recognition that resulted in a breakdown of mutual

recognition. In the moments of Ashley smearing feces, spitting, threatening staff with urine and other unidentified liquids, one could argue that her selfhood was at stake and being struggled for. But due to the risk and security frameworks at play, Ashley was responded to as a "disgusting" and "threatening" object who had to be controlled and managed; she was not seen, nor treated as a subject struggling for selfhood. Consequently, mutual recognition broke down. As Benjamin (2018) argues, a breakdown of mutual recognition into a relation of twoness institutes an "unresolved opposition" between subjects (p. 24). The opposition results in an inability to resolve conflict and co-construct reality and contributes to the other being seen as an object rather than a subject.

This subject-object dynamic has implications for the cycle of behaviours that appeared between Ashley and the institution. As Sapers' (2008) report highlights, a vicious cycle ensued of Ashley "acting out," the institution responding with force, Ashley's behaviours escalating as a result, and then the institution's response escalating in force, and so on. A recognition framework allows us to understand this cycle and escalation. Benjamin demonstrates that in the struggle for recognition, the other appears to threaten the self's sense of autonomy and independence; therefore, the self attempts to control this threat, to distance oneself from it, and to subjugate the other by establishing a position of omnipotence. But as Benjamin (1988) highlights, "the more the other is subjugated, the less he is experienced as a human subject and the more distance and violence the self must deploy against him" (p. 220). The more that the institution segregated Ashley, responded to her with physical force, and stripped her of her basic needs, the more Ashley's "humanity" or being as a subject in the world was diminished. Yet, this attempt at objectification of Ashley through attempts to establish the institute's

omnipotence meant that even more force was needed to try and “keep” her in the position of object, particularly as her “disruptive” behaviours continued. Although Ashley’s behaviours were “disruptive,” they were disruptive in a way that is different from the meaning assigned to them by security or penal institutions. She was disruptive of the category of “object,” and thereby to the category of “omnipotent, autonomous, and independent subject” that the institution wanted to secure for themselves. As she continued to disrupt the institution from claiming an omnipotent subject position, the institution responded with increasing force. Ashley’s death is Hegel’s “life and death” struggle for recognition embodied, lived out, and taken to its tragic end.

“Disgusting Object”—Ashley

In chapter three, I argued that by framing disgust experiences as a meeting of two subjects, it becomes possible to imagine more than one active subject in the encounter. A recognition framework thereby allows a consideration of Ashley’s position as “disgusting” object and consider the ways in which she was an active subject. I will argue that in the disgust encounters between Ashley and the institution, Ashley was also struggling for selfhood—for the position of a speaking, acting, feeling subject. My analysis will take up Sartre’s concept of the look that I detailed in chapter three, as well as Benjamin’s theory of recognition.

“Pieces of Knowledge”—Ashley’s knowing of herself through the struggle for recognition

Central to my argument in this dissertation is the claim that selfhood is actively being constituted in and through disgust encounters. This is arguably not an easy thing to “see” concretely as processes of selfhood are complex and not always readily available for

identification or naming. In other words, it is (unfortunately) not as simple as saying, "In that moment when I felt disgust, I was establishing myself as an autonomous subject" or "in that disgust encounter, I was being constituted as a passive object." The difficulty to identify or name, however, does not mean that the experience or impact is illegitimate nor insignificant. Accounting for disgust's impact is not only important for the claim that disgust encounters are constitutive in processes of selfhood, but also for continuing to locate subjects on both "sides" of disgust encounters—those feeling disgust and those named as disgusting. In Ashley's case, there is some explicit and concrete "evidence" of the impact of disgust encounters on Ashley's naming of herself, or her expressed sense of self. This is visible in one particular journal entry. [69]

The particular journal entry was part of a longer entry written during her time at the New Brunswick Youth Centre, which, as earlier stated, involved over eight hundred incidents that resulted in two thirds of her time being spent in an isolation cell (Richard, 2008). In the entry, Ashley contemplates suicide and writes:

> Maybe I will use a brand new pair of socks. Fresh for me. No I don't f****ng deserve a new pair of socks. I will use the old dirty ugly ones. Ha Ha *that kind of explains me. Dirty and ugly*. Two peas in a pot (sic). F*** THIS WORLD!!! Ha Ha. (emphasis added, Smith qtd. in Richard, 2008, pp. 23–24)

The language of disgust—dirty and ugly—is evident in this passage. Dirty and ugly are qualities first assigned to the sock, but then trigger Ashley to identify herself as having

[69] My only access to Ashley's journal entries has been through those reprinted in the New Brunswick Ombudsman and Child and Youth Advocate's report (Richard, 2008).

these qualities. This passage can be interpreted as suggesting that the disgust encounters that unfolded between Ashley and the institution contributed to transforming Ashley into a "disgusting object" and that Ashley herself began to identify with this position. The transformation of Ashley into a "disgusting object" impeded recognition of Ashley as a subject. Disgust is active in processes of selfhood and Ashley's journal entry stands is yet another sign of disgust's impact on how we understand ourselves and on *how* we come to understand ourselves.

The meaning of disgust's impact on Ashley's self-understanding is harder to decipher. If we return to Sartre's theory of the look, which I proposed as one way to gain insight into the subject position of the one named "disgusting," we can see that Ashley's statement is seemingly at odds with Sartre's arguments. Sartre (1992) argues that the other and their gaze "does not serve as a regulative or constitutive concept for the pieces of knowledge which I may have of myself" (p. 367); however, Ashley's explanation seems to be a clear expression of a "piece of knowledge" about herself. In other words, they are an example of precisely what Sartre says is *not* possible as a result of the other's gaze. Yet, if we examine further, Sartre may be applicable in the fact that this piece of knowledge arose in the context of dirty socks and while contemplating suicide. For Sartre (1992), statements of knowing the self through the other's looks will be "fleeting notions whose very nature will be to escape me" (ibid). The nature of Ashley's statement is difficult to identify; the statement of "knowing" is embedded within the context of suicide, alongside assessments of worth ("No I don't f****ng deserve a new pair of socks"), written expressions of laughter ("Ha ha"), and the transmission of dirtiness and

ugliness from a sock to her. These factors are suggestive of the unknowability and alienation that Sartre identifies to be active in the experience of being looked at.

As I argued in chapter one, when a disgust encounter occurs between two subjects, the traditional subject-object explanations of disgust are inadequate for understanding what the disgusting "object" may experience, feel, or do in light of being named "disgusting." In this section, I considered one example of what a "disgusting" subject may experience in relation to the look of disgust cast by others. I now turn to consider some of the other actions a "disgusting" subject can take. I will consider Ashley's use of primary disgusting objects to evoke disgust in others. Sartre's theory of the look, especially the partiality of the look, alongside Benjamin's theory of recognition offer a framework for making sense of these encounters.

Understanding Ashley's use of disgust—Intersubjective theory's active subjects

I have continued to highlight the intersubjective nature of disgust in this dissertation as it allows a reconfiguration of disgust as an encounter between two *active* subjects—active in the encounter, but also active in establishing their respective senses of self. An intersubjective account of disgust results in there being a different meaning or significance for repulsion and fascination; they become relevant to how subjects come to understand themselves and others and as a result, how they relate to and interact with others and the world.

As we have seen, Ashley regularly "used" primary disgust objects like feces, urine, and saliva in her interactions with correctional officers (Carlisle, 2013; Hannah-Moffat, 2013; Richard, 2008; UCCO, 2008). These moments can easily be dismissed as

Ashley "acting-out;" this is exactly how a security framework interprets these behaviours. However, their deeper significance is evident if considered from the perspective of recognition and selfhood. To understand how disgust encounters can be meaningful for processes of selfhood, I have proposed Benjamin's understanding of recognition. Specifically, I would like to turn to Benjamin's (1988) argument that recognition is the response from the other that "makes meaningful" the self's experiences, feelings, intentions, and actions. Not only is it a process of "meaning making," recognition "allows the self to realize its agency and authorship in a tangible way" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 12). This realization comes from the subject seeing that their actions impact others and that they play a role in creating, sustaining, breaking, and repairing the intersubjective relation.

My discussion earlier emphasized how the institution's actions towards Ashley objectified her and attempted to deny her a subject position from which to speak and act. I suggested that this objectification could be understood in an intersubjective account of selfhood in which a sense of self is struggled for in relationship to others. The relationship between Ashley and the institution broke down and hindered the recognition of both as equivalent "centers of being," or "like subjects" (Benjamin, 2004, p. 5). In attending to the institutional response to Ashley, it became apparent that the institutional responses could be interpreted as attempts to secure a position of "omnipotent subject" through an objectification of Ashley.

Ashley's attempt to secure a subject position is locatable in her "use" of primary disgusting objects. In using disgusting objects, Ashley was not trying to become disgusting herself or to "accept" the label of "disgusting," but rather to claim a subject

position. The reason is deceptively simple. Subjects act, while objects are acted on. In using her own "disgusting" bodily fluids, Ashley en-acted a subject position.

A recognition framework allows us to understand (beyond the simplified statement of subjects act, objects do not) the intersubjective mechanism that is "driving" Ashley's use of disgust objects. Recalling Hegel's articulation of the struggle for self-consciousness discussed in chapter three, Ashley's actions can be interpreted as attempts to have her subjectivity acknowledged by the other. This acknowledgement is necessary as "self-consciousness exists only in being acknowledged" (Hegel, 1998, p. 111). Objectifying Ashley through segregation can then be understood as a kind of refusal to acknowledge her. Given that selfhood depends on this acknowledgement, it follows to reason that behaviour that would elicit the other's acknowledgment would increase in response to this objectification. As Boyd's (2011) research showed, encounters with primary disgust objects are cited as some of the most stressful for correctional officers. It stands to reason that using primary disgust objects are effective in eliciting a response from others. It is also true that Ashley did not have many other options in terms of objects that could be used given the extreme state of her isolation. Bodily fluids become an available and accessible object in these situations. Nevertheless, Ashley's use of primary disgusting objects continued even in cases when she had access to other objects, such as shards of glass and ligatures. This indicates that disgust objects were not used *only* because they were available, but because they were significant in some other regard. As I have been arguing, they are significant in the struggle for recognition as they demand a response from the other to "make meaningful" Ashley's experiences, feelings, intentions, and actions (Benjamin, 1988, p. 12). In some sense, the reports were right; Ashley's

behaviour *was* about "acting-out," but not in the colloquial sense of the expression. Rather, it was an acting-*out* in that the actions moved outwards towards others and for a very specific reason—seeking the response of the other in order to know herself as a subject. Consequently, this increase in disgust behaviours is much more complex than what might be first assumed.

Recognition frameworks can also offer an alternative interpretation of Ashley's suicide attempts in relationship to her use of disgust. As I noted earlier, it is significant that disgust encounters are consistently discussed alongside suicide attempts across the Ashley Smith documents, both pre- and post-humous. This is because existence is at stake in both disgust encounters and in suicide. This becomes particularly significant in understanding *how* Ashley's use of disgust objects enacts or claims subjectivity. Again, the reason is deceptively simple. A subject can defecate, urinate, and tie ligatures around their own neck. An object cannot. A subject can die. An object cannot. Ashley's relentless attempts at suicide, her persistence in smearing her feces on the cell walls and cameras was an attempt to "contaminate" the institution with what is human so as to claim her own humanity; just like her, the institution shits, pisses, and dies. Ashley reminded the institution of this shared fact unremittingly in order to reject the position of "object" that she was reduced to through the actions of the institution.

Not only can dying enact a claiming of a subject position, but it also affirms the *impossibility of the object position*—I can die, therefore I can never be an object. Even in the most restrictive and violent of regimes, I can exist as a subject through the possibility of my death. I do not presume to know whether Ashley "truly" wanted to die or not, nor do I intend to suggest that she did *not* want to die. I do wish, however to suggest that her

attempts at suicide may have been about more than just a desire to die; they could have been about, or *also* about the desire *to live as a subject* and perhaps about the desire to die as a subject. This interpretation of Ashley's actions seems particularly pressing given that many correctional officers expressed confusion about her behaviours and persistent attempts at suicide.[70] For example, one management plan document entitled, "Management and Re-integration Plan for Ashley Smith," names this confusion directly:

> For this reason, it is often difficult to discern her true intentions: what begins as a means for drawing attention or relieving stress via a maladaptive approach, could quickly deteriorate to a serious attempt at suicide. (UCCO, 2008, p. 19)

It is all too easy to "blame" Ashley for this too, to dismiss her actions as those of a "mad" person, rather than to understand them in the context of selfhood and the *struggle* for selfhood. The "madness" does not lie in Ashley, but in the institution where a young girl throwing an apple at a postal employee eventually results in her death while those trusted to care for her watch her die.

Ashley's use of disgusting objects can also be considered using Sartre's theory of the look. As Sartre (1992) argues, the look of the other is not absolute and I can refuse to identify with what the other makes me to be by casting a look in return. By casting a look in return, the other is objectified and "I *recover* myself, for I can not be *an object for an*

[70] As officer Phibbs recounts in the report prepared by the union, ""When I came back she was already tied up…It looked exactly like every other event. I'd seen her at least 50 times tied up like that. At least five times she was blue in the face. And I personally cut the ligatures from her neck between 30 and 40 times" (UCCO, 2008, p. 34). This is the account of one officer, who alone had witnessed at least 50 attempts at suicide and/or self-harm. The report further outlines that "hundreds" of officer statements and observation reports detail occurrences where officers had to "forcefully remove ligatures" from Ashley's neck, sometimes up to six or seven times in one day (ibid., p. 8).

object" (original emphasis, Sartre, 1992, p. 384). If we take Sartre to be correct, then Ashley could have cast a look in return to reject the objectification of the other's gaze. Ashley's options for casting an *actual* look in return were quite limited given that she was in isolation and had no human contact aside from speaking to others through a food slot, and when COs entered her cell to restrain her or remove ligatures. Indeed, Ashley's "sight" was limited given that correctional officers watched her through video surveillance in the days leading up to her death (UCCO, 2008). As the one being watched through a camera, Ashley could not see those that were looking at her[71] and it is therefore difficult to cast a look in return in the traditional sense of "looking at someone" or making eye contact. Even if Ashley looked into the camera as a way of "casting a look in return," she could not know if that look was seen by an other, if it was acknowledged, or if it had any impact.

Given the ways Ashley's actual sight was limited, we must consider that Sartre's sense of "the look" goes beyond the framework of literal sight to consider other forms of "casting a look." Sartre (1992) writes that even though the look "most often manifests" in "the convergence of two ocular globes in my direction," the look can just as well be cast in other ways that represent "the eye" (p. 345). Sartre uses the example of branches rustling, or the sound of a footstep followed by silence to be an indication that someone *could* be there to cast a look; these sounds make the look a probability (ibid.). To understand Sartre's look as possible, and probable, even without "the convergence of two

[71] Ashley's experience evokes Jeremy Bentham's (1843) prison concept: the panopticon. The panopticon allows inmates to be watched at all times, or to feel that they are being watched at all times because the design of the panopticon prevents inmates from ever seeing the prison guards. Bentham believed that this design would result in inmate behavioural reform as inmates would behave *as if* they were being constantly watched.

ocular globes," means that Ashley's use of disgust can be interpreted as casting a look in return; it is through these actions—smearing feces, splashing urine, tying ligatures—that she rejects the position of object that has been cast on her via the institution's "look," and consequently claims a subject position. In her use of disgust, Ashley can be interpreted as, in Sartre's (1992) terms, "recovering" herself from being an object.

Casting a look in return, however, does not result in resolution. Indeed, we saw that in Ashley's case, a vicious cycle of escalating behaviours ensued rather than resolution. Just as the theoretical discussion of Sartre's theory of the look left us at an impasse—be the one recognizing or the one recognized—here too we are left at an impasse if we end the discussion with Sartre. In Benjamin's words, it leaves us with "twoness" where there is only room for the reality and experience of one of the subjects. To move beyond this impasse and consider the possibility of mutual recognition, of repair even, we must turn to consider fascination. I have argued that attending to fascination in disgust allows for a different practice of disgust; this possibility is present in Ashley's case as well, though it does not become intelligible until we consider it vis-à-vis Benjamin's arguments for thirdness. First, however, we must locate fascination and then turn to consider whether it holds the possibility for something other than a vicious cycle of escalating force to unfold in the disgust encounters between Ashley and the institution.

Locating Fascination

One of my central claims in this dissertation has been that the lack of understanding around fascination in disgust encounters is because disgust has not been traditionally framed as a relational encounter. Consequently, a relational analysis affords visibility to

fascination in disgust encounters and contributes to understanding around why it occurs and to what end. Locating fascination in Ashley's case is not as clear as tracking repulsion; nevertheless, reframing the disgust encounters between Ashley and the institution as struggles for recognition exposes the work of fascination alongside repulsion. This tracking requires us to keep in mind the broader definition of fascination that I outlined in chapter one—fascination as a pull *towards*, an interest, a draw, a movement towards something, as opposed to fascination as a universally positive experience of attraction and delight.

Fascination—the "pull towards"—in Ashley's case is locatable in Ashley's use of disgust objects and the ways in which fascination was blocked or thwarted. In her acts of "becoming" repulsive through smearing feces and other bodily fluids, Ashley enacted a form of fascination as these repulsive acts were a pull towards others, a pull for reaction, for the "live connection" to other subjects that had been denied through her isolation. Sending Ashley to segregation and only interacting with her through the food slot were the institutional attempt to check her "repulsive" and "disruptive" behaviours. In doing so, the possibility of fascination, of being pulled towards something beyond the self—for *both* Ashley and the COs and management—was inhibited or denied.

Even here however, the switch between repulsion and fascination is subtle and slippery; just when you think you have identified and pinned down the moment of repulsion in the push away from others, it escapes your hold and fascination (as a pull towards) has taken its place. This is precisely the push and pull of repulsion and fascination in disgust; they are not neat and distinct categories of experience, but strain against, with, and alongside one another. This strain is intelligible when we understand it

as situated in a struggle for recognition, in the struggle to assert that "I exist." This struggle has the paradox of self and other at its centre ("I want to assert myself as an independent and autonomous being, yet I need you to do this and this undermines my independence and autonomy…"). This paradox is reflected in its felt experience and even in the effort to write and theorize about it.

In a relational analysis of these encounters as struggles for recognition, the "repulsive" and "disruptive" behaviours can be understood as attempts for connection or relation to others. As Benjamin (1988) highlights, this connection is necessary to make meaning in the world. It is critical for the emergence of selfhood—for being recognized as a speaking, feeling, acting subject in the world. This relation, this pull towards live contact with other subjects, was so significant that it was worth dying for. Ashley's continuous attempts at suicide may be interpreted as a desire for death, but in a recognition analysis, they could also be a desire for life, for live contact with others to assert herself as a subject in the world. Consequently, the institutional responses to segregate and isolate Ashley created the conditions for her death. This is not because the institution failed to "protect" her or manage the "risk" she posed for herself (and supposedly, to others), but because it failed to attend to the call of fascination, the call for relation to others that is at the foundation of selfhood.

As I argued in chapter three, Benjamin's discussion of attunement in recognition is useful for understanding the threat that fascination may present. In a recognition framework, fascination as a pull towards others can be experienced as threatening as this pull towards others presents a risk to the self's feeling of distinctness as a separate subject. Understanding fascination in this way complicates the disgust encounter as it is

no longer *just* about a disgusting object being offensive, but rather about the sense of self that is implicated in the encounter. Being pulled towards another can be "experienced as dangerously close to losing oneself in the other (Benjamin, 1988, p. 170). Consequently, fascination or the pull towards others can feel like a "dangerous forc[e]" because it threatens the sense that "I" am a distinct and separate subject (ibid., p. 175). This perspective—of fascination or the pull towards as threat—provides even more insight into the reasons behind the forcefulness of the institution's response. Existence or "being-subject" was at stake in these disgust encounters and therefore, a "life or death" struggle ensued to assure a sense of self. Connection to others becomes threatening to securing a sense of self and thereby must be repudiated, even if this requires violent means.

The report prepared by the union for Correctional Officers explicitly names Ashley's connection to others as a risk. Ashley had become friends with another inmate who had allegedly been the leader of a hostage-taking incident in August of 2005. An officer recounts the significance of the relationship between Ashley and the other inmate:

> This is an important factor in this situation because girls like Ashley, who are motivated by social contact with her peers and who distrust those in authority or people who are involved in her care and custody, tend to make bonds with those around her. This represents a risk, especially when the person who is a peer is motivated by her own power and control issues. (UCCO, 2008, p. 29)

What strikes me in this officer's statement is the lack of recognition that the need for "social contact" is a shared human need and not something only particular people—"girls like Ashley"—might need. The officer explicitly names Ashley's connection to this other

inmate as a “risk.” In one sense, it is understandable that it is considered a risk if the other inmate supports or encourages dangerous behaviours; however, the language here reveals that the motivation for social contact, for connection to others, is the “important factor.”

Lisa Guenther’s (2013) work on segregation practices in Canada and the US expose this exact argument: that practices of solitary confinement are based on a “Cartesian ontology of ‘the human’” that rejects dependency and connection to others. Guenther (2013) argues that solitary confinement leads to an “eroding or undermining” of subjectivity as it “deprives prisoners of the bodily presence of others” (p. xii). The “concrete experience of other embodied subjects” is necessary for “concrete personhood” to develop and to be sustained (ibid.). Guenther takes the “unhinging” that occurs when prisoners spend time in solitary confinement to be evidence of the intersubjective basis of personhood and of *experience*:

> It’s not just that prisoners grow depressed or psychotic, although this could very well happen; it’s that the intersubjective basis for their concrete personhood, and for their experience of the world as real and objective, as irreducible to their own personal impressions, is structurally undermined by the prolonged deprivation of a concrete, everyday experience of other people. (Guenther, 2013, p. 35)

Though Guenther (2013) does not draw on the recognition literature or framework specifically, her arguments align by proposing a “constitutive relationality” for selfhood (p. 36). In particular, Guenther argues that the *way* in which solitary confinement erodes personhood is that it “undermines prisoners’ capacity to make and sustain meaning” (ibid.). This resembles Benjamin’s arguments about the struggle for recognition being the

process by which we make and sustain meaning. For Guenther, the deprivation of the processes and interactions through which we make meaning, leads to *social* death. She writes,

> Social death is the effect of a "social" practice in which a person or group of people is excluded, dominated, or humiliated to the point of becoming dead to the rest of society…The social dead may speak, act, compose symphonies, or find a cure for cancer, *but their words and deeds remain of no account*. (emphasis added, Guenther, 2013, p. xx)

Once again, we see that connection to others is a life or death question. If one's words or deeds "remain of no account," this suggests that the connection to others is severed, mutual recognition is severed as one cannot "realize its agency and authorship in a tangible way" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 12). The segregation and isolation that Ashley experienced created the conditions for her social death. This is significant for her physical death: "If the meaning of my life is confined to my biological existence, then it amounts to almost nothing; one swift blow to the head, and it could all be over" (Guenther, 2013, p. xxiii). Creating the conditions for Ashley's social death consequently created the conditions for her physical death because the institution operated on an understanding of the human that rejected reminders of dependence and connection to others as they threatened the Western ideals of autonomous, rational, independent subjects. As I argued in chapter two, this same concept of the subject has resulted in an inability to account for the work disgust does, especially in terms of the effects that fascination may have given that it suggests connection to and dependence on others. This "call for connection" to others is locatable in the disgust encounters between Ashley and the institution, as well as

in Ashley's use, or mobilization of disgust. In doing so, Ashley called for a reaction, a response through which her words and deeds would be of account, through which she could realize her agency and authorship in a concrete way. The work of disgust is therefore twofold in the disgust encounters between Ashley and the institution. Disgust encounters played a role in creating the conditions for Ashley's social death as they contributed to her being segregated, but they were also moments in which Ashley resisted this social death and struggled to claim a subject position.

By understanding disgust encounters as struggles for recognition, Ashley's use of disgust to elicit a response can be reframed as a form of fascination in its pull towards others. Consequently, this can be interpreted as an invitation or demand to be recognized as a speaking, acting subject. As I argued in chapter three, the presence of the "pull" towards others, alongside the "push" away in disgust encounter is noteworthy in that it signals at the possibility of responding to the disgusting "object" as a separate subject. In other words, there are other possibilities for responding to "disgusting" objects than the ones that unfolded between Ashley and the institution. One of these possibilities is the creation of "thirdness." Identifying where and when fascination occurs is one place to begin the creation of thirdness; I turn to consider this next.

Possibilities for Thirdness in the Ashley Smith case

The possibility of repair in Ashley's case is, of course, impossible, as no amount of effort can bring Ashley back to life.[72] Any consideration of whether repair was possible is

[72] In recognition language, death is the ultimate "loss" of tension as there is no longer a breathing, responding, active being to create tension, or create tension with. As Benjamin (1988) writes, "Indeed, once

retrospective. Given, however, that the conditions Ashley faced are not unusual, and that dying in prison is not an uncommon phenomenon,[73] questioning the possibility of repair is pressing. It is also pressing given that the question of repair applies to disgust encounters more generally.

One of the strengths of Benjamin's approach to recognition is that it acknowledges that there are moments in which recognition fails and the relationships involved require repair. In fact, Benjamin argues that breakdown does not just happen sometimes, but is *integral* to intersubjective relations. As a result, she locates the *possibility* of repair and this is noteworthy. Breakdown is no longer a "failure" of the relationship, but rather, breakdown is one aspect of a complex process. As I suggested in chapter three, understanding breakdown to be central to the experience of disgust means that there is the possibility of accounting for and repairing the relation between subjects that meet in disgust encounters. We recall that thirdness for Benjamin, and the possibility of repair in cases where mutual recognition has broken down, is dependent on *sustaining tension* between self-assertion and recognition.

The sustaining of tension, and therefore of mutual recognition for Benjamin requires a recognition of difference. As we saw in the previous chapter, accounting for difference means that the question of recognition can also be phrased as ""From what

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the tension between subjugation and resistance dissolves, death or abandonment is the inevitable end of the story" (p. 65).

[73] Concerning details have continued to arise about recent deaths in Canadian prisons. For example, the death of Matthew Hines in 2015 and Terry Baker in 2016 both invoked comparison to the Ashley Smith case, including increased pressure to implement the recommendations that resulted from the coroner's inquest into Ashley's death. For more on Hines' and Baker's deaths, see Donkin, 2017a, 2017b; "Female inmate, 30, dies," 2016; "Inmate found dead," 2016.

position is it possible to respect difference, or rather multiple differences?" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 80). The respecting of difference, which sustains tension between self-assertion and recognizing the other, "accepts the premise that others are separate but nonetheless share like feelings and intentions (Benjamin 1998, p. 53). A breakdown of recognition, however, means a relationship of "twoness" where only one of the subjects can "live." Consequently, there is only room for one subject's reality and the possibility of co-constructing reality is foreclosed. This means that the question of repair is, in part, about how reality can be co-constructed or how the *capacities* needed for co-creating relational systems of mutual recognition can be fostered (Benjamin, 2006).

In Ashley's case, the retrospective question of repair centers on exactly the capacity for co-constructing a *relational* system, especially given that relationality was hindered because of Ashley being segregated. This relational system is partly constructed through acknowledgement of our responsibility for destructiveness and damage. As the previous chapter emphasized using the analogy of a car crash, this acknowledgement is of both our own responsibilities and capacities for damage, and also a general acknowledgement that damage exists in the first place and is experienced by others (Benjamin, 2006). The overall aim of this chapter has been to acknowledge the fact that disgust encounters caused damage, not only in the sense that they contributed to Ashley's death, but that they damaged the relationships involved. As I argued in chapter three, this acknowledgement is significant in that it can allow for action around something that has been previously paralyzed by fear or threat. Though not specifically speaking to Ashley's case, the accounts of correctional officers in Boyd's (2011) study are testament to the damage disgust encounters more generally can cause. As Ashley's case and Boyd's study

show, disgust encounters can lead to stress, distrust, and fear in correctional institutions. Acknowledging that disgust encounters *matter* in relationship and selfhood validates the suffering of others by the basic fact of giving it attention (Benjamin, 2015, p. 16). If it is worthy of attention, it matters. Disgust matters.

Disgust's significance is evident in the Ashley Smith reports as it is consistently mentioned. Even without any form of analysis, the frequency with which disgust encounters are mentioned in the reports indicates that they were meaningful. Their significance, however, is different from what the institution identifies it to be. For the institution, disgust encounters mattered in that they were a threat to Ashley's safety, and to the safety of her fellow inmates, the correctional officers, and to the broader "safety" of the institution (its reputation, safety from law suits, maintaining positive public perception, etc.). To say that disgust mattered only for security and risk management upholds the notion of the subject as an autonomous, independent, and omnipotent being; it perceives individuals as closed systems (non-relational) and therefore conceives of disgust as also a non-relational, individualistic phenomenon that should be "managed" by efforts focused on the individual. A prime example of this would be to separate the "disgusting" individual from others, as CSC did with Ashley, because this perspective considers disgust encounters to be about the individual people involved, rather than the *relationships* and contexts that disgust encounters arise within. This is precisely the problematic ontology that leads to practices of extreme segregation in prison contexts, to "unhinged" subjects who suffer social, and physical death as a result. To acknowledge, in the sense that Benjamin is calling for, is not only to recognize the damage that was caused by this particular framing of disgust (witnessing in our theorizing), but also to

recognize the other ways in which disgust mattered. Acknowledgment therefore in this case depends on recognizing that disgust mattered not for "security" and "risk" concerns, but for intersubjective relations and the subjects whose selfhoods were at stake in these encounters.

For Benjamin, acknowledgment of responsibility leads to agency as it acknowledges that my actions matter to others. As a result, I am called to act so as to address the impacts of my words and deeds. As Guenther (2013) showed however, solitary confinement prevents a sense that one's actions and deeds have any impact on others. Ashley had no concrete embodied others who might have responded to her, who might have shared in "coconstitut[ing] both the meaning of the world and our own sense of personhood" (Guenther, 2013, p. 20). Ashley did not know, *could* not know or register the impact of others on her, nor the impact she had on others. What might this mean in terms of "doing things differently"? It means that there must be processes in place that allow impact to be registered and that acknowledge the impact of and on *all* parties. In doing so, it creates possibilities for action beyond "control or control the other," which are the only two options when the struggle for recognition breaks down into a structure of complementarity. As Benjamin (2006) highlights, these two options can lead to a sense of helplessness as it seems that there is a loss of control and nothing that can be done. Acts of acknowledgement interrupt this helplessness as it can lead to experiencing the self and others as "agents helping to shape a co-created reality" (ibid., p. 123).

This form of relationship—where both subjects can live as subjects in and after the breakdown of recognition—is the work of the "third." In Benjamin's words, it is an act of "submitting" *to the third*, rather than *to the other.* Submitting to the third means

that the interactions are guided by the "imperatives of participating in a *two*-way interaction" rather than the one-way interactions that mark a domination-submission dynamic (emphasis added, Benjamin, 2006, p. 136). As a result, conflict can be observed, processed, and mediated (ibid.).

It is imperative to keep in mind that Benjamin's concept of the third is not about harmony, but about the experience of surviving *dis*harmony and destruction. Consequently, it is "founded on the moments in which attunement works" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 143 fn.2). Were there moments in which attunement "worked" in encounters between Ashley and the institution? Certainly. The union report refers to moments in which correctional officers spent hours lying on the floor next to Ashley's cell door trying to speak to her, interactions in which Ashley's needs and the needs of the correctional officers aligned, and moments of cooperation and negotiation (UCCO, 2008). The report calls Ashley a "likeable kid" who "had her good qualities" and "was funny" (ibid., p. 8). Though these moments were not necessarily in response to disgust encounters, they invited the possibility of building the shared understanding that is at the basis of forging the fragile, prone to breakdown "third" (Benjamin, 2015). Instead, the primary and overshadowing understanding of Ashley was as a "problematic" and "disgusting" inmate.[74] This interpretation was particularly evident in the institutional response to disgust encounters, which is, in one sense, understandable given that Ashley's "disgusting" behaviours were not understood as struggles for selfhood.

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[74] One report written during Ashley's time at the Joliette Institution for Women recounts that, "We have never had an inmate as problematic as [inmate Smith] in the 10-year history of this institution" (UCCO, 2008, p. 23).

One incident is especially noteworthy in that it demonstrates that there were efforts towards a relational approach with Ashley, yet this too broke down and a security framework took its place once again. At the Nova Institution for Women in Truro, Nova Scotia, a document instructed COs to engage verbally with Ashley when she was self-harming. The document instructed COs to repeat the following phrase until Ashley complied: "Ashley, we want to work with you. Doing that does not allow this. Hand over the (item) please" (UCCO, 2008, p. 18). This statement expresses a clear intention to work with Ashley, a moment of possible attunement. However, the document goes on to say, that this statement should be repeated until she complies, "*unless it's causing her to escalate*. Keep the communication 'matter-of-fact' so that it *minimizes reinforcing this maladaptive behaviour*. If she continues to self-harm or escalate the severity of the self-harming, *normal security procedures will prevail*" (emphasis added, ibid.). A domination-submission dynamic is reinstated: Ashley's only options continue to be submission *to the other*. The relational framework is replaced with "security procedures" in which the priority is to de-escalate and minimize risk. I am not arguing that minimizing the harm Ashley causes herself is a poor goal, but rather, I am critiquing that the security framework is enacted for doing this. The security framework decontextualizes these behaviours and misunderstands them as "acting-out" (Hannah-Moffat, 2013).

Institutional policies, interventions, and guidelines that are rooted in "risk management" and focused on security are less effective in resolving conflicts between inmates and the institution because they are unable to account or speak to what is in question in these interactions—the struggle for recognition. In this struggle, relation to

others is at stake and it is this relation that risk management and security frameworks lose sight of in their responses, including their responses to disgust encounters. However, some of the post-humous policies, reports and recommendations that resulted from the investigations into Ashley's death do show an understanding of the importance of relationship.[75] The language is, of course, different from the recognition theory-based narratives I have been drawing on here; the reports primarily contrast a "mental health care" approach with a "security" approach. As Sapers (2008) recounts, the CSC's management plans for Ashley were primarily "security-focused" and "lacked mental health components" (p. 7). I interpret the "mental health care approach" to be a synonym for, or associated with a "relational," or intersubjective approach in that it prioritizes the subject, their welfare, and the relationships that the subject is involved in.

The report to the Coroner prepared by Dr. Kelly Hannah-Moffat, was very clear in stating that a relational approach to Ashley's care could have prevented her death. Hannah-Moffat (2013) continued to forefront the importance of *relationships* in managing chronic self-harm inmates throughout the report (p. 10). Her report directly influenced and informed the jury recommendations that resulted from the Coroner's inquest. Two jury recommendations express the need to shift from a security approach to a relational approach. The first addresses the approach staff members should take in their interactions with inmates, as well as whom staff should be reporting to:

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[75] It is my view that these recommendations would be more effective if they could account for the mechanisms that drive the interactions between inmates and penal institutions. In other words, account for the relational structures and relational stakes at play in encounters that may seem inconsequential, like when an inmate smears their cell with faeces. Assessing correctional institutional practices is beyond the scope of this thesis, though indicates a potential avenue for future application of the ideas presented in these discussions.

> That all staff provide mental health care will report to, and be accountable to, health care, *not security*, and that the *therapeutic relationship should not be compromised by the assignment of security-focused assessments*. (emphasis added, Carlisle, 2013, n. 10)

This recommendation is explicit in prioritizing health over security. As I argued, security approaches prioritize risk reduction and as a result, subjects are treated as objects to be "managed" to achieve the lowest level of risk and highest levels of safety possible. The shift toward the prioritization of health is therefore significant as it prioritizes the well-being of subjects. This prioritization is reflected in jury recommendation 15:

> That female inmates with serious mental health issues, and/or self-injurious behaviours serve their federal terms of imprisonment in a federally-operated *treatment facility*, *not a security-focused, prison-like environment*. (emphasis added, Carlisle, 2013, n. 15)

Hannah-Moffat (2013) explicitly identifies the shift from security, or punishment frameworks, to mental health care frameworks as a shift that could have prevented Ashley's death. It could have led to different actions being taken in response to Ashley, and consequently, to a different outcome. It is my contention that a mental health framework—a relational framework—could have prevented Ashley's death by contributing to different responses to disgust encounters. This is, in part, because mental health frameworks forefront the importance of relationship; a punishment and security framework makes it difficult to establish "meaningful therapeutic relationships" (Hannah-Moffat, 2013, p. 12). A relational approach could have reframed disgust

encounters as significant for relationship and therefore led to interventions and actions focused on acknowledging and repairing the relationships involved. It is my view that a security framework hinders *any* kind of meaningful relationship, whether they are in an official therapeutic context or not. Furthermore, as the discussion has shown here, an intersubjective understanding of selfhood shows that meaningful relationships more generally are necessary for human life.

Jury recommendation 83 is perhaps most significant if considered from Benjamin's perspectives on repair and mutual recognition. The recommendation states that:

> The inmates who have experienced mental health issues within correctional systems *be involved* in planning, research, training and policy development with respect to the provision of mental health care for female inmates. (Carlisle, 2013, n. 83)

This is meaningful in that it gestures at the possibility of mutual recognition and co-constructing reality. Having inmates involved in the planning, research, training and development of their own care communicates a relation between subjects, rather than a relation between subject and object. It sends the opposite message of complementary relations—"'Nothing you do or say can affect me, I am who I am'" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 32)—to say, "Your actions and words affect me." It is a recognition of all subjects as equivalent centres of feeling, thought, and action: as "like subjects" (Benjamin, 2004, p. 5). This is enacting the "third" in which inmates are not submitting to the institution, but

both institution and inmates are “submitting” to the interactive, two-way *exchange* of influence (Benjamin, 1988).

More specifically, this is enacting Benjamin’s moral third that is the ability to sustain the difference between needs, while still being attuned to one another (Benjamin, 2018). The moral third refers to the “values, rules, and principles of interaction that we rely upon in our efforts *to create and restore the space* for each partner in the dyad to engage in thinking, feeling, acting or responding rather than merely reacting” (emphasis added, Benjamin, 2009, p. 442). Clearly, the needs of inmates and the institution differ (while still overlapping), yet this approach of having inmates involved in the process is an act of acknowledgement and attunement to them *as subjects*. It creates the space for *response* on the part of all involved. A similar approach could have been undertaken in response to the disgust encounters that took place between Ashley and the institution. Inviting Ashley to engage in a process to observe, process, and mediate the conflict that disgust encounters caused would be significant in co-constructing the moral third. Lastly, thirdness is about the intention to connect to others (Benjamin, 2018); jury recommendation 83 is an expression of this exact intention.

As Hannah-Moffat (2013) highlights however, the integration of mental health services into penal environments is a “persistent concern” in the research literature. Indeed, the “punishment nature of the prison environment inevitably makes the therapeutic intent of programs and services vulnerable to being overshadowed by security and risk issues” (ibid., p. 12). Many have argued that mental health and penal environments are “parallel universes” given their differences in values and goals (ibid., p. 12). In other words, mental health approaches are too different from the values and goals

of penal environments to be successfully integrated into them. This can be connected to Hegel's position about whether "giving" recognition is possible. In Hegel's model (1998), "giving" recognition is felt to be negative and undesirable. The Hegelian subject does not want to recognize the other and does so *only* when no other options are available (Benjamin, 1998). It is tempting, for myself also, to conclude that in a penal environment, "giving" recognition to inmates can never be experienced or seen to be anything but "submission to the other" and therefore, different responses to the disgust encounters that unfolded between Ashley and the institution are also foreclosed. The oppositional structure of penal institutions seems so deeply embedded that it is difficult to imagine what it could look like otherwise. However, as Benjamin (1998) argues, breakdown into oppositional relationships *will* happen and indeed are "equally vital moment[s] in the movement of recognition" (p. 83). The difficulty of mutual recognition, particularly in a penal environment, and the near inevitability that it will break down, should not be taken as a sign of "parallel universes," but rather the imperative of "participating in a two-way interaction" (Benjamin, 2018, p. 39). As I argued in chapter three, this is applicable to disgust encounters as well; an analysis of disgust encounters as struggles for recognition situates them as *two*-way interactions that do break down but can be repaired.

Rather than trying to avoid breakdown, acknowledging that breakdown *will* happen opens the possibility of addressing the impact and consequences (domination, aggression, violence, etc.) that can occur when recognition fails. It does this by locating breakdown as a part of relationship, not as some unbearable destination that we cannot return from. Disgust encounters between Ashley and the institution resulted in an entropic cycle because the encounters were not framed as a part of a relationship, of a

two-way dynamic that could break down and does break down, but that can be repaired. This is the fragility of mutual recognition; it is hard to maintain, it breaks down. Yet, it can be restored and repaired and this is why it must be continually forged through "repeated experiences of rupture and challenge followed by some negotiation of some version of shared understanding" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 140). My aim in this section has been to suggest that the disgust encounters between Ashley and the institution did have opportunities for negotiating shared understanding and for co-constructing meaning and relationship.

As my discussion of Ashley's death has shown, the stakes in disgust encounters are far more significant than what might at first be assumed. Actual life can be at stake and therefore, forging thirdness is a critical task in addressing the ethical question of disgust. Moments of fascination in disgust gesture at the possibility of forging thirdness in disgust encounters, for meeting one another as "like subjects" in and after disgust encounters.

Moral Witnesses

I would like to close this chapter by appealing to Benjamin's proposal for "moral witnesses." Moral witnesses create space for the "third" by upholding the idea that everyone can live. They create space for the third by acknowledging violations, injustices, and suffering of all parties in order to break a relation of domination in which only one subject can "live." In Ashley's case, there was only one subject who did live in the end—the institution. But Ashley did live, and she did live *as a subject*, regardless of how forcefully the institution attempted to deny this. The denial of Ashley as subject, or

her objectification, was instituted via a constriction of the subject through a thousand small moves. Through Ashley's mobilization of disgust objects, she refused objectification and "recovered," even if only momentarily, a subject position. In those moments, Ashley was an active, speaking, feeling subject, rather than a passive, inert object. My hope has been that this chapter continues to serve as moral witness to Ashley's life, both to the injustice, suffering, and violence she endured, but also to the ways in which she resisted objectification and lived *as a subject*.

This is why we must attend to disgust. Disgust matters in how we come to a sense of ourselves, of others, and the world. It matters in how we negotiate intersubjective relations, and in how we make meaning about our experiences, actions, and feelings. Even in the most restrictive and inhumane of circumstances, disgust encounters occurred. Perhaps most significantly, *both* repulsion and fascination appeared, thereby indicating the need to revisit disgust encounters in ways that account for its complex and paradoxical elements. Even though Ashley's situation was not "ordinary" by any means, disgust operated in "everyday" kind of ways; disgust encounters were so commonplace that their importance to the life and death struggles Ashley and the institution engaged in were overlooked and unaddressed. By acknowledging and accounting for the disgust encounters that shaped Ashley's incarceration and death, we expand our understanding of what happened and why. This understanding applies not only to Ashley's case, but can inform our understanding of why disgust encounters can lead to violence, aggression, and harm in settings outside of prison. My analysis of the circumstances leading to Ashley's death supports my argument that disgust encounters *matter* as they undertake work in processes of selfhood, intersubjective relations, and in world-making. In other words, an

analysis of Ashley's case makes it even more concretely evident what is at stake in disgust encounters. By reframing these disgust encounters as struggles for recognition via Benjamin's approach, we see disgust "at work" in Ashley's case, we see disgust's stakes at play, we see how and why moments of disgust can translate into harm and violence. As my discussion in chapter two argued, it has not been as difficult to see the "how" as examples of disgust's connection to harm abound, but it has been challenging to understand the "why." An examination of Ashley's case via Benjamin expands an understanding of the "why" in critical ways.

Not only does this expand our understanding of disgust and Ashley's circumstances, but it also gestures at the possibility of "doing disgust differently." I have argued that doing disgust differently involves a relational, intersubjective account that affords space for the work of both repulsion and fascination. In Ashley's case, a different approach to disgust encounters could have meant the difference between life and death. Through an analysis of disgust encounters in Ashley's case, we are reminded that our actions and reactions to disgust matter, both at personal, social, and institutional levels.

I find it important to remember Ashley because her life and suffering demand witnessing. They demand remembering. Her suffering was marked and shaped by disgust encounters and therefore disgust demands witnessing as well. In attending to disgust, I have tried to acknowledge, or bear witness to the fact that disgust encounters mattered and caused damage. I find it important to remember Ashley as a subject who lived, suffered, and died as a subject, not an object, and whose encounters with disgust are a reminder that the pushes and pulls of repulsion and fascination do not just signal distaste, but, rather, are the moments in which selves, relationships, and worlds are struggled for.

Conclusion

> *To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it, but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion. (Gadamer, 2003, p. 305)*

I return to the question I proposed in the introduction to my thesis—what does disgust *do* in the world? My research has suggested that disgust encounters are a constitutive element of how we understand ourselves, others, and the world. In other words, disgust is about meaning-making. The work disgust does is, therefore, central to everyday lived experience and to the ways in which we navigate daily life.

My research makes conclusions in two key areas. First, my account of disgust expands on social and relational accounts of emotion to examine the work emotions undertake in the world. Second, my work furthers an understanding of the ethical question of disgust and allows us to consider ethical responses to other human beings. In the discussion that follows, I consider each of these two areas and highlight my key conclusions and their significance. From this, I examine and address two possible limitations or critiques of my arguments. Namely, the argument that fascination does not always occur in disgust encounters, and second, the question as to whether and how my arguments apply to encounters with inanimate objects of disgust.

In the second half of this chapter, I discuss the institutional and educational applications of my arguments. My discussion highlights the relevance of my work to

feminist scholarship on emotion, educational theory and practice, therapeutic practice, and lastly, to correctional institutions and disciplinary discourses.

Key Conclusions

Exposing the work of disgust

My research contributes to the growing body of social and relational accounts of emotion. This approach asks what emotions *do*, rather than what they *are*. Accordingly, my focus has not been on defining disgust definitively, but rather on attending to the ways disgust is active in processes of selfhood and world-making. In doing so, my analysis contributes to an understanding of disgust, but one that is not intended to re-define disgust conclusively. My aim has been to expose the complexities of disgust and to suggest one way in which both repulsion and fascination can be understood in tandem with one another, and in terms of the work they undertake in the world.

In approaching disgust as a struggle for recognition, my research situates disgust as a relational experience that is both ontologically and epistemically significant. In doing so, it challenges traditional subject-object approaches to emotion generally, and disgust specifically. In mapping the push of repulsion and the pull of fascination alongside the struggle for recognition, my analysis suggests that disgust is not a mere push away or pull towards objects of disgust, but rather, that subjects are actively *constituted* in this push and pull. In other words, disgust is not about an already formed subject, responding to an already formed world as proposed by traditional accounts of emotions, but rather, subjects are actively *constituted* in this push and pull and *in relationship* to what has been named to be disgusting. Disgust encounters are therefore central to the self's sense of

distinctness from others; it is an experience that "makes meaningful" one's actions, feelings, and experiences (Benjamin, 1988, p. 12).

Furthermore, by employing an intersubjective subject-subject approach, it makes it possible to account for more than one active subject in disgust encounters. This has been difficult in intrasubjective approaches that conceive of the individual as a closed, independent system in which emotion arises within the subject and moves outwards towards objects. By "locating" the possibility of more than one active subject in disgust encounters, my analysis was able to consider the position of the "disgusting" subject. A consideration of this subject position becomes pressing in a subject-subject framing of disgust; without it, my approach would continue to prioritize a disgusted subject responding to a disgusting object. Consequently, my analysis suggested that disgust is relevant to processes of selfhood and meaning making for *all* subjects involved in disgust encounters. Such an account has not been possible in intrapsychic models of disgust thus far.

My research therefore offers a different perspective on repulsion and fascination. Repulsion is no longer aimed at *only* instituting separation from an object of disgust, but involves the self's struggle for independence, autonomy, and selfhood. Perhaps most significantly however, my work provides a framework in which fascination and its effects are intelligible alongside repulsion. In my approach, fascination is no longer an oddity or a quirk as it has been in current accounts, but rather can be understood as the pull towards others, towards attunement and connection that make up the struggle for recognition. As such, fascination is not categorically opposed to repulsion, but works alongside it, strains and pushes against it in order to claim and sustain selfhood.

Rather than being categorically opposed, my approach has suggested that repulsion and fascination are in relation with one another in a process of meaning making. Both are active in exerting influence on the subjects involved in a disgust encounter; both are active in how subjects come to understand themselves, others, and the world. This process of meaning making does not result from either repulsion or fascination alone, but from the ways in which they strain, pull, and push against one another. I suggested in chapter three that understanding disgust in this way is to conceive of it like a flexible and moving elastic band between the elements of repulsion and fascination. In this elastic metaphor, it is difficult to tell where repulsion ends, and fascination begins. Attempting to identify a "beginning" and an "end" on an elastic band is misguided, if not impossible. Similarly, it is my view that attempting to categorically separate repulsion from fascination is misguided as the more pressing aspect is the *movement* between them and its consequent impacts. To focus on distinguishing them would be to overlook the *effect* of their pushes and pulls. Furthermore, just like pulling on an elastic band, both the movement and the effects of disgust require tension; for disgust, it is the tension between repulsion and fascination. To understand disgust in this manner, as a *non-linear process* in which tension is vital to its operation, significantly expands current conceptualizations of disgust. It moves away from attempts to categorize disgust towards understanding the work it can undertake in selfhood and world-making. It situates disgust as an intersubjective experience that is ontologically and epistemically significant.

My research is also significant in that it applied my theoretical approach to disgust to a case study. By examining disgust encounters in Ashley Smith's incarceration

and the circumstances leading to her death, my approach demonstrated disgust "at work" in a concrete manner. The significance of this analysis was to continue exposing the ways in which disgust is operative in processes of selfhood and meaning making for all subjects involved in a disgust encounter—both disgusted and disgusting.

Reframing disgust as a struggle for recognition also suggests why fascination has been understood as "terrible" and "upsetting" as it exposes what is at stake in fascination. In my approach, fascination invokes one's sense of self and therefore, the threat it brings is a threat to a subject's feeling of distinctness, of being a separate subject. Consequently, it can be experienced as threatening in our theorizing. But without a relational framework, this threat has been difficult to understand and has lead to fascination being dismissed or diminished as an oddity. My research suggests one way to understand why fascination has been threatening or difficult to comprehend both at a personal, experiential level and in our theorizing.

My analysis of the work disgust undertakes broadens an understanding of the affective processes between and within individuals in the context of how a "sense of self" develops and is sustained. In taking this account, we begin to move towards conceptualizations of selfhood and world-making that align with the lived experience of being a feeling, embodied subject. This conceptualization acknowledges that subjects exist and act in relationship to other subjects in biological, social, cultural, and political contexts. Furthermore, exposing the work of disgust is relevant for shifting *how* this work might unfold in future disgust encounters. As Jaggar (1989) writes, "emotions are simultaneously made possible and limited by the conceptual and linguistic resources of a society" (p. 151). I have sought to expand the conceptual and linguistic resources around

disgust and if we take Jaggar to be correct, this impacts the ways in which disgust can be felt, conceived, and mobilized.

Expanding the ethics of disgust

By reframing disgust as an intersubjective relation, our understanding of its ethical question expands. I argued that despite accounts of disgust's relevance to moral and ethical issues, there has been an inadequate understanding of the "motor" that can provoke repulsion to become acts of harm. My research has argued that the harm that disgust can lead to is because of the stakes of disgust: selfhood. Reframing disgust as a moment where the struggle for recognition unfolds exposes these stakes and leads to a more thorough account of the ethical question of disgust. Acknowledging these underlying stakes is necessary for understanding the ethical demands of disgust and imagining viable ethical responses. It is along these lines that Solomon (1995) writes that "any account of justice that does not include reference to and appreciation of the personal feelings that go into it is in danger of defending not justice as such but rather a rationalized sense of defensiveness" (p. 265). By understanding why and how disgust can lead to violence and harm, we can potentially move towards actions and responses that mitigate this aspect of disgust encounters.

My research has maintained that disgust is a relational and intersubjective experience. As such, the ethical question of disgust expands as it invites a consideration of how subjects negotiate and construct disgust *with* others and in the world, rather than with only inanimate objects of disgust. The ethical stakes are much more significant if I am deciding how to react to a pool of vomit versus a *person* covered in vomit. Yet, the debates on disgust's ethical question have continued to treat these situations in similar

ways—prioritizing one active subject who alone decides how to respond to a disgusting object, that *happens* to be a subject. As I argued in chapter one, this intrasubjective approach to the ethics of disgust continues to ask, what do *I* do with *my* disgust. Disgust continues to be configured as an inside-out phenomenon in this approach; it is an interior, private experience and consequently, the ethical actions that arise from it are similarly individualistic and intrapsychic in orientation. So, in fact, these actions are limited ethically as they do not consider the other as an equivalent centre of being, as a "like subject" with a "distinct, separate center of feeling and perception" (Benjamin, 2018, p. 22). As I have argued, Benjamin's approach to recognition and her conception of thirdness are one way in which to imagine and practice ethical actions that can sustain recognition of both subjects, all subjects, as equivalent centers of feeling, thinking, and acting. This is a significantly different approach to answering the ethical question of disgust as it suggests that mutual recognition is a possibility in disgust encounters, and that overcoming disgust is not the only possible action in response to feeling disgusted by another. This not only expands an understanding of the ethical question of disgust but expands an ethics of human interaction more generally.

Analyzing disgust intersubjectively also situates disgust as relevant to world-making. The emergence and sustenance of selfhood is not separate from others or the world as they are ongoingly co-constituted in relationship with one another. I have argued that disgust is a relational affect implicated in processes of selfhood and in "world-making"; therefore, the ethical question of disgust is not just about singular personal moments, but about collective and social responsibilities. This is an important shift in the approach to disgust's ethical question. It takes disgust beyond the personal and private

realm and situates it in the political, social, and public realm. This impacts not only the range of disgust's ethical implications but suggests that "interventions" into harmful disgust encounters also need to be politically, socially, and publicly oriented. Our ethical responses or interventions cannot only be about personally "getting over disgust" or individual efforts to control our disgust but must encompass and account for the ways in which disgust operates beyond individual and private feeling. My approach to disgust allows for this acknowledgment and via Benjamin's approach to processes of recognition, gestures at possible avenues for pursuing political, social, and public forms of co-constructing thirdness in disgust encounters.

The complexity of disgust experiences also signals the difficulty of fostering ethical responses in ways that account for the tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes of lived experience. As I suggested in chapter one, our ethical responses will be partial and unlivable if they deny the affective nature of human experience. Consequently, treating the other ethically when they disgust us cannot be synonymous with an attempt to deny or clear away the experience of disgust. This is, in part, why it is important to look at the simultaneity of fascination and repulsion in disgust. This simultaneity is indicative of the complexity of feeling at play in ethics, but more importantly, gestures at the possibility of acting ethically and humanely *while feeling repulsion*. Ethical responses are not located *outside* the pushes and pulls of disgust, nor are they found in a binary of either/or thinking that suggests that we cannot be disgusted *and* act ethically. In response to this complexity, I argued that attending to fascination, both in theory and in experience, suggests a different approach to disgust's ethical question. Given that one of my aims in this dissertation was to approach fascination differently—as an equally legitimate

element of disgust—I worked to approach the ethical question while considering both repulsion and fascination. I worked to do this both in my theorizing of disgust, but also in my account of the circumstances leading to Ashley Smith's death. The insights provided by a consideration of disgust encounters in Ashley's case not only expand our understanding of what happened and why, but also gesture at the possibility of "doing disgust differently." I have argued that doing disgust differently involves a relational, intersubjective account that affords space for the work of both repulsion and fascination.

Fascination can signal that there is connection to others (my "sense of self" is a "sense of others") and that mutual recognition is therefore a possibility. As I highlighted, I am not arguing that fascination equates to a "giving of recognition," but rather that it signals at its possibility. Fascination in disgust therefore does not need to be a "terrible" attraction, but rather can be a promising one. This promise is not of harmony, or of overcoming repulsion—but the promise that there are possibilities beyond the dichotomy of "being recognized" or "giving recognition." My analysis therefore suggests that the struggle between repulsion and fascination does not need to result in an irreparable relation of domination and disconnection between subjects; there are ways to feel repulsed *and* fascinated with the other and establish a relationship with this other in ways that maintain this tension. This is significant in that it suggests that when disgust encounters breakdown, there is the possibility of acknowledging and repairing the relation between subjects. This possibility arises when we account for the fact that selfhood is "at stake" in these encounters because this allows interventions and repair work to align with the actual issues at play. The issue is not whether something or someone *is* or *is not* disgusting, or whether we *should* or *should not* feel disgusted; if we

remain committed to the idea that these are the issues at stake, then our understanding of the ethical issue and our ethical responses will miss the mark. We *do* feel disgusted at times, including disgust at other subjects, and in these encounters, our sense of self is being forged. Therefore, in order for our responses to disgust to be ethical, they must account for the experience of being disgusted, as well as for what is at stake: selfhood and world-making. In other words, ethical responses to disgust must correspond to the struggle of selfhood that disgust encounters can entail. If they do not, ethical responses will remain abstract "oughts" that do not correspond to lived experience in a meaningful and effective manner.

As I discussed earlier, approaching disgust from the perspective of "thirdness" as it is understood by Benjamin—a co-constructed process of acknowledgement, taking responsibility, and witnessing—is a significantly different answer to the ethical demands of disgust. Rather than disgust being about submitting to another, to a disgusting object/subject, disgust encounters have the possibility of "submitting to the third" as a form of surrendering to the "imperatives of participating in a two-way interaction" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 136). *This* form of submission allows conflict to be observed, processed, and mediated (ibid.). Applying Benjamin's concept of "submitting to the third" offers one way in which the ethical demands of disgust can be addressed.

My research therefore shifts the ethical question of disgust by re-orienting it towards the stakes that are at play. I do this not only through a theoretical engagement, but through my case study analysis of Ashley Smith's incarceration and death that demonstrates the ethical stakes of disgust encounters in a concrete and observable way. The question is not whether repulsion or fascination is stronger or more "true" to the

disgust experience and therefore whether it is appropriate as a moral guide. The question is whether the subjects in the disgust encounter can both live as subjects *in* and *after* the encounter. My analysis suggests that indeed, subjects can both live in and after disgust encounters and in a relationship where reality can be co-constructed and mutual recognition can be fostered.

Possible Limitations

Before I consider the institutional and educational applications of my work on disgust, I would like to raise and address two limitations, or possible critiques of my research. The first possible limitation is that disgust encounters do not always involve the feeling of fascination and that therefore, my understanding or definition of disgust as a struggle between repulsion and fascination is unsuitable. There are indeed moments when we *just* feel repulsed by something. I do not, however, see this as undermining my arguments. My aim in this dissertation has not been to provide a universal theory or definition of disgust, but rather to gesture at the complexity and variety of disgust experiences. In some sense, my aim has been about two of the smallest words in the English language: "the" and "a." The model of disgust that considers repulsion and the "push away" to be the key aspect of disgust has been *the* model; fascination has only figured as a paradoxical oddity, a quirk or kink in the armour of repulsion. One of the aims of my research has been to relativize the repulsion response as one aspect of a spectrum of experience in disgust. It has been my goal to make it clear that the "push away" model is only *a* model of disgust. Accordingly, I am not suggesting that repulsion and fascination always occur equally in disgust encounters; to do so would mean merely replacing one generalized approach with another. Rather, my goal has been to capture the complexity of

disgust experiences and to articulate that the push away model is insufficient, in itself, to represent this complexity. I have therefore provided a different understanding of disgust and the work it undertakes.

The second possible critique of my arguments is that disgust as a struggle for recognition cannot apply to disgust evoked by inanimate objects. In other words, how can disgust encounters with inanimate objects be interpreted as struggles for selfhood? I understand that this question arises given that an inanimate object cannot respond to us in the sense that other subjects can, and so we are not invested in an inanimate object's acknowledgement of our selfhood (it cannot provide it) in the same way that we are in the acknowledgement of another subject. My rebuttal to this concern draws on disgust's "stickiness."

As I discussed in chapter one, disgust is metonymically and literally "sticky" in that it brings concepts, ideas, images, objects, and subjects into association with one another (Ahmed, 2004b). These associations collapse into one another and are subsumed under the label of "disgusting." This means that an inanimate object that has been named "disgusting" is not necessarily disgusting because of its physical properties, but rather because of the meanings and associations—the ideational factors—that it draws on. The question of objects is therefore not categorically separate from subjects, from animate beings in the world. The attempt to make them categorically separate has been, in part, what has lead to the myopic focus of trying to identify inherently disgusting and universally disgusting objects. In my consideration of disgust's "stickiness," I presented the example of a person wearing a shirt with vomit on it and discussed the ways in which the entire shirt can become viewed as disgusting, as can the person who is wearing it.

Therefore, we cannot draw a definitive line that marks where a disgusting object and its "disgusting" properties begin and end. This means that inanimate disgusting objects can be referencing a range of other objects, concepts, ideas, and subjects. It is therefore very possible that a disgust encounter with an inanimate object could be a struggle for recognition, a struggle for selfhood, as the inanimate object hearkens, or references abstract and concrete others.

This is further supported by Herz's (2012b) argument about how policing which foods are ingestible and which are disgusting is actually a policing of cultural and social in- and out-groups. As I discussed in chapter one, this suggests that the designation of "disgusting" is shaped by cultural and social norms. Perhaps most significantly, it is shaped by cultural and social *teaching*. The psychological research on when children express or learn disgust is particularly relevant here, though not in the way researchers may have intended. Research suggests that children do not show disgust reactions in early life, nor do they show recognition of disgust in others (Rozin & Fallon, 1987; Rozin et al., 2000; Widen & Russell, 2008, 2010). Rather, expressions and recognition of disgust do not seem to appear until the age of three, before which children seem to have quite the opposite reaction to primary objects of disgust. For example, Rozin and Fallon (1987) observe that young children seem to have a "tendency…to play with, mold, and smear excreta" (p. 33). For my argument here, this research is significant in that it indicates that disgust reactions have elements of teaching and learning, particularly around what *objects* are, or are not disgusting. This pedagogical element of disgust means that even inanimate disgust objects are constituted *relationally*. A child is learning how to navigate disgust and disgust reactions *through relationships* with caregivers, teachers, and other

significant others who indicate what objects are or are not disgusting. In other words, the "disgusting" label attached to inanimate objects is mediated through relationship. Just as a disgusting object can reference a host of other meanings, ideas, and objects, it can also reference a host of other subjects and relationships within which "the disgusting" formed. Therefore, even inanimate objects are not outside of, or removed from intersubjective relations or the struggles for selfhood that unfold within intersubjective spaces.

In my understanding of the struggle for recognition, it is not necessary for another subject to be there in front of my eyes in order for me to engage in a struggle for recognition. As I discussed in chapter three, our sense of self "accompanies" us wherever we may go and consequently, the struggle to maintain that selfhood also accompanies us. This struggle can be invoked whether the object of disgust is physically present or not, and even in imaginary or distanced "meetings" with other subjects. Disgust encounters and reactions can linger with the self as continuations of the struggle for recognition, especially given that the struggle for selfhood is not a singular event, but rather a struggle we are called to again and again. This struggle can and does sometimes unfold in our disgust encounters even with inanimate objects.

Areas of Relevance and Future Avenues of Research

Conceptual and theoretical approaches to disgust have "real world" implications. As I have already suggested, conceptual alignments bear on lived experience as they contribute to the terms of description and structures of meaning that we use to interpret, understand, and navigate our experiences with others and in the world. I would like to highlight some concrete areas of relevance for my work, as well as suggest future avenues of research that these areas afford for a consideration of disgust. My discussion

focuses on four areas: feminist scholarship on emotion, educational theory and practice, therapeutic practice, and correctional institutions.

Feminist scholarship on emotion

At the broadest level, my research contributes to feminist scholarship that questions Western conceptions of emotion, ontology, and epistemology. By attending to emotion, we begin to chip away at the historically gendered conceptualizations of emotions, knowledge, and selfhood and continue efforts to bring emotion, the "lowly sister" of reason, in from the cold (Boler, 2015, p. 1491). In doing so, my research challenges the historical disavowal of the "feminine" and situates it as personally, politically, and socially relevant.

This reclamation of emotion's significance also bears significance on how selfhood is conceived and experienced. As I have argued, disgust can be configured as a hallmark emotion of individualist paradigms given how the feeling of repulsion and the reactions it can motivate align with the ideals of individualism (separation, autonomy, and independence). However, to expose disgust as an encounter that can involve connection and a pull toward others, as I have done here, challenges the foundations of the valorized male subject. To draw out "feminine" elements in disgust is to expose that theories of disgust and selfhood contain precisely that which they have worked to exclude. In so doing, the contingent and constructed nature of these discourses is revealed and thereby introduces the possibility of new discourses about emotion, selfhood, and their intersection. By reframing disgust as significant for processes of selfhood, especially by showing both repulsion and fascination to be relevant, my project takes up

and contributes to feminist critiques of how Western subjectivity has been theorized and mobilized.

More specifically, my arguments are relevant for translating feminist critiques of Western intellectual traditions into a different account of disgust and selfhood. As I highlighted in chapter two, critiques are not in and of themselves a different account or theory. Critiques create the *possibility* for different accounts, and in my view, the next step is to apply the insights provided by critiques as paradigms for developing new and different theories of emotion and selfhood. My approach to disgust and processes of selfhood are an application of feminist critiques toward a relational, intersubjective account of disgust as a form of meaning-making.

Educational theory and practice

As my research suggests, expanding our understanding of disgust also develops our understanding of selfhood, and of the ways in which we can relate and respond to one another. Consequently, my research has relevance for educational theory and practice given its focus on human development, both in its general sense and in its more specific forms of schooling and pedagogy. In the discussion that follows, I consider the relevance of my arguments to epistemology, curriculum, and the daily lived reality of classrooms and school environments.

My arguments have epistemological relevance as they show how disgust can be a *way* to know and raises the question of *what* we know through disgust, as well as what we *can* know through disgust. As I have shown, disgust can serve harmful, oppressive, and violent ends as it did in Ashley Smith's imprisonment and death. Consequently, it

becomes an ethical imperative to attend to disgust as an epistemological inquiry. What kinds of knowledge does disgust serve to construct? What do we learn and teach through disgust? What is disgust's relationship to truth, justification, belief, and ideology? As educators, what are we *doing* and performing when we express disgust, for example, when teaching certain subject matters? My research suggests that the teaching and learning of disgust can be about our very sense of self as a distinct being, as a subject in the world. Given that selfhood is relational, disgust can also be a form of knowing about how to relate to others, and how to treat others, especially across difference. My arguments are therefore relevant not only for understanding the ways that emotion can impact knowledge construction, but it provides a way to intervene in problematic or harmful knowledge construction. It does so by acknowledging that disgust is relevant to problematic knowledges, and in so doing, identifies a locus for intervention and critical discourse.

A teaching anecdote is useful here for illustrating my point. As a teaching assistant for an undergraduate course on social issues in education, it was a common question at the beginning of the term as to *how* people come to hold problematic and discriminatory views. Students were often bewildered as they could not fathom how differences in skin colour, culture, or sexuality, to name a few, could develop into oppressive beliefs and viewpoints. The answer is complex, but my research suggests that one of the ways that such views can develop is through affective experiences such as disgust. In other words, disgust is a micro mechanism through which larger structural oppressions come to be.

Students also expressed feeling overwhelmed by structural and institutional oppression and inequality as it seemed impossible to intervene in such a large "machine." My arguments are indicative that disgust can also be a micro mechanism of *change*—by acknowledging and attending to disgust and the ways it is active in constructing knowledge about ourselves and others, educators can use disgust as an invitation for critical reflection and inquiry, including critical self-reflection, and for negotiating disgust encounters differently than how prevailing Western cultural narratives suggest they should be dealt with.

Such an approach resonates with Megan Boler's (1999) call for a "pedagogy of discomfort" that "begins by inviting educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others" (p. 177). Boler goes on to say that a pedagogy of discomfort focuses on "recogniz[ing] how emotions define how and what one chooses to see, and conversely, not to see" (ibid.). This inquiry is founded in the recognition that one's sense of self and perspectives are contingent and hence, there is room for re-imagining and re-constructing world views (ibid.). My arguments provide a framework for critical inquiry into feelings of disgust and disgust experiences. My research offers a concrete basis from which to develop a pedagogy of discomfort by gesturing at some of the direct ways that disgust is shaping what one chooses to see and not to see. In other words, my arguments offer an entry point into discussion about the complex and sometimes confusing experience that is disgust. This entry point is centered on acknowledgment that disgust is relevant to how we come to a sense of self, others, and the world, and to the ways that we treat one another.

At the level of curriculum, my arguments have relevance for areas such as social justice education, peace education, critical pedagogy, and reconciliation studies. The work of educational theorist Michalinos Zembylas (2015), for example, argues that attending to emotion by practicing "critical emotional praxis" is a way in which conflict and trauma can be reconciled and resolved. As my teaching anecdotes highlighted, feelings of disgust were a part of how students accessed, thought about, and interpreted social justice issues and concepts. Disgust shaped their views on these issues, including their biases and prejudices. Accordingly, it is my view that curriculum on these concepts needs to address their affective dimensions and take seriously the role of affect in processes of learning, teaching, and critical inquiry. My arguments show that disgust is a relevant emotion in this type of work and curriculum development should incorporate this acknowledgement.

Attempts to acknowledge disgust in curriculum have been limited, if non-existent. As Cathrine Ryther (2016) argues, education maintains a taken-for-granted ideal image of "pedagogically desired emotions" (p. 267). These include emotions such as calmness, emotional neutrality, and enthusiasm, and do not include emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, or anxiety (ibid.). Indeed, disgust is not a pedagogically desired emotion in numerous respects and it is certainly not considered relevant nor ideal for curriculum. Yet, disgust is active and significant in curriculum in various ways. It is active in shaping what is and is not in the curriculum, in shaping how curriculum is interpreted by students and teachers, and is certainly active in the hidden curriculum. In a sense, disgust is part of what Deborah Britzman (1998) calls "difficult knowledge." Difficult knowledge is knowledge that is not easily assimilable, it is what education and educators "cannot bear

to know" but is already at work in the educational "unconscious" (ibid., p. 61). Difficult knowledge is opposed to "lovely knowledge"—the knowledge we *wish* to discover, learn, and teach (Pitt & Britzman, 2003). It is my view that curriculum that is personally, socially, and politically relevant should critically reflect on its "lovely knowledges," challenge its phantasms of knowledge, and attend to the difficult knowledges that impact our shared world-making as educators and students. These difficult knowledges are part of the lived realities of human life. If educational theory and practice are divorced from the lived realities of experience—the complexity of feeling, motivations, and beliefs—they risk being ineffective. My research is therefore relevant for developing educational philosophies and pedagogies that resonate with the realities of personal, interpersonal, and social experience.

In addition to epistemic and curricular relevance, my research bears significance to daily classroom encounters and interactions, as well as to the well-being of individual students. I have continuously emphasized the "everydayness" of disgust and classrooms are no exception. As my personal anecdotes began to suggest in the introduction, expressions of disgust can be daily occurrences in a classroom and in school environments. Feelings of disgust and expressions of disgust can impact the interpersonal relationships and interactions in a classroom, including serving as motivation for bullying, fights, hostility, and discrimination. Consequently, disgust can shape the daily schooling experiences of students and teachers alike, and the general mood or feel of a classroom or school. It is not difficult to imagine that encounters with disgust can even shape the experience of specific school spaces, like washrooms, hallways, or changerooms. For example, imagine that every time a student walked down the hall,

people spat at them in disgust, looked at them with disgust, or avoided touching them as they walked past because they had been deemed disgusting. In this example, disgust encounters would be constitutive of this student's experience and knowing of the hallway as a school space.

My arguments about disgust are therefore relevant for developing teaching methods, classroom supervision methods, mediation and/or conflict resolution programs that acknowledge that disgust *does* something in school settings. Expressions of disgust are not a result of schooling experiences, but *shape* and constitute the experiences themselves. This also has relevance for broader school initiatives such as anti-bullying programs that currently do not incorporate any sustained examination of the experience of disgust in bullying. As Zembylas (2005) argues, emotion is the "least investigated aspect of research on teaching, yet it is probably the aspect most often mentioned as being important and deserving more attention" (p. xvii). My research suggests that disgust is an important experience to attend to in educational settings and bringing this acknowledgement into educational program development could further increase their effectiveness as it would ensure programming and curriculum resonate with the underlying motivations that drive problematic and difficult behaviours in schools.

My exploration of Benjamin's suggestions for "thirdness" as a way to acknowledge harm and move towards reconciliation is one way to begin developing interventions in educational contexts. This is a future avenue of inquiry as concepts of thirdness have not, to my knowledge, been used in developing educational programs, nor have there been disgust-focused interventions in schools. This line of inquiry could build on Charles Bingham's (2001) work on recognition in schools and expand to a

consideration of how disgust operates in classroom environments and how it impacts school-based forms of recognition, especially as disgust is implicated in the "circuits of recognition" that involve students and educators (p. 130). As Bingham (2001) highlights, "The encounter with the other is crucial to education because recognition can promote the flourishing of students and teachers" (p. 141). My arguments show disgust to be implicated in encounters with others and therefore, expanding an understanding of disgust's role in encounters with others can also expand an understanding of how to support the well-being of students and teachers. Some of the research questions that arise in this context are: how are disgust feelings and experiences being talked about in schools? How are they being addressed formally and informally, if at all, when they arise in school settings? What kinds of interventions, classroom practices, and teaching methods can develop from the acknowledgement that disgust experiences can be a struggle for recognition?

This application of my research would be an extension of Benjamin's call for processes of acknowledgement in co-constructing relational systems personally, politically, and socially. As I discussed in chapter three, Benjamin (2006) argues that acknowledgment involves recognition of our own responsibility or capacity *for* damage, as well as an acknowledgement that damage *exists* and is experienced by others. For Benjamin, acknowledgment of responsibility leads to agency as it involves the recognition that my actions matter to others. If my actions matter to others, I am called to act in order to address the impacts of my words and deeds. My interest in researching the development of disgust-focused interventions in educational contexts would be to examine whether a process of acknowledgement around disgust would be meaningful for

not only acknowledging existing harms, but also for developing agency and empowering educators and students to take responsibility for the worlds they (affectively) live in.

Therapeutic practice

Given the developmental focus of my research, my arguments are also significant to therapeutic practices and interventions. My argument that disgust is active in processes of meaning-making aligns particularly well with Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) as it maintains that the processing, organization, and explication of emotions is key in fostering change (Greenberg, 2004, 2017). This perspective is founded in the view that emotion is adaptive and related to needs, beliefs, goals, wishes, and action (Greenberg, 2017). Accordingly, therapeutic strategies in this framework "promot[e] the awareness, acceptance, expression, utilization, regulation, and transformation of emotion" (Greenberg, 2017, p. 3).

The relevance of my work is to suggest what some of the underlying needs, beliefs, and goals of disgust could be and thereby support the continued development of EFT strategies related to disgust specifically. This could come to bear especially in national and international reconciliation efforts aimed at healing from histories of harm and violence, especially for the work of therapists and counsellors engaged in these efforts at both individual and community levels. For example, Jessica Benjamin works with groups in Israel and Palestine to reconcile ongoing conflict and trauma, while Masahiro Minami, a scholar-practitioner in Counselling Psychology at Simon Fraser University, works in Rwanda to implement programs fostering acknowledgement and healing after the violence and atrocities of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Recognition of the disgust that may have been (and may still be) active can be a part of these efforts as a

small, yet focused and significant way to foster reconciliation. This possibility stems from my arguments that disgust is a powerful experience that shapes individual, interpersonal, and community identities and actions. Consequently, an extension of my research into therapeutic research and practice has potential implications for reconciliation and healing, the restoration of relationships at interpersonal and community levels, and the proactive promotion of mental health.

Correctional institutions and disciplinary practices

Lastly, my analysis of the events leading to Ashley Smith's death indicate that my work is relevant for the paradigms informing correctional institutions and their disciplinary policies and practices. My research contributes to the efforts already underway to bring alternative accounts of subjectivity and selfhood to correctional institutions (Guenther, 2013; Hannah-Moffat, 2013). I suggested in chapter four that the recommendations for institutional policies, practices, and guidelines that resulted from Ashley Smith's case would be more effective if they accounted for the intersubjective processes that underlie the interactions between inmates and penal institutions. This is particularly relevant as the existing research, as limited as it may be, shows that encounters perceived to be disgusting in correctional institutions often lead to inhumane segregation practices for inmates and high levels of stress, burnout, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for staff (Boyd, 2011). Developing processes and/or training programs around these kinds of disgust encounters in prisons can therefore be a way to foster well-being for both prisoners and staff and the relationships between them.

This suggests a future avenue of inquiry and application of my work. I would be interested in examining disgust encounters more broadly in correctional institutions, and

assessing both the institutional response to these encounters, as well as inmate responses. Furthermore, I would be interested in whether there are possibilities for co-creating Benjamin's sense of thirdness in penal and disciplinary contexts and whether mutual recognition can be fostered partly through accounting for disgust.

Matters of Disgust: Disgust Matters

My work has tried to show that the matters of disgust are broader than what research has understood them to be. Disgust matters for processes of selfhood and world-making. Disgust encounters create structures of meaning about the self, others, and the world; these structures allow subjects to organize, interpret, and understand their experiences, intentions, and actions.

I have argued that our understanding of disgust needs to be expanded to account for the element of fascination alongside repulsion, and to account for the ways in which disgust is implicated in selfhood and world-making. Without a more comprehensive sense of how experiences like disgust are active in constituting a sense of self, a sense of the world, and a sense of others, we cannot imagine or attempt possibilities for personal and social change that are sustainable. The sustainability of such change is tied to the degree to which they correspond to human experience, which is perpetually affective.

This shift in understanding is imperative given the implications of disgust for imagining and practicing our ethical responsibilities towards one another. My aim has been to acknowledge that disgust encounters matter in relationship and in processes of selfhood and through my theorizing, work towards legitimating the work disgust undertakes. The stories we tell about disgust in our daily narrative accounts and in our

theorizing matter as they are constitutive of self-experience and of the ways in which we make sense of our experiences in the world. Theory as witness can engender different ways of experiencing and navigating disgust encounters and consequently, different ways of experiencing selfhood and relations with others.

In some sense, this work has been a “practice in the sustaining of contradiction” between self and other, independence and dependence, assertion and recognition, repulsion and fascination (Benjamin, 1990, p. 44). However, this tension between contradicting terms and concepts is precisely what Benjamin’s work calls us to. Through tension, through the pushes and pull of disgust we can make “live contact” with other subjects and potentially practice ethical actions that recognize one another as equivalent and equal centers of feeling, thinking, action, and being.

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